Student Editions

Chopin
Preludes
For the Piano

(JOSEFFY)

SE-5016 G. Schirmer New York/London $2.00

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THE PRELUDES

I

THE Preludes bear the opus number 28 and are dedicated to J. C. Kessler, a well-known composer of piano studies during Chopin's time. But it is only the German edition that bears his name, the French and English editions being inscribed by Chopin "à son ami Pleyel." As Pleyel advanced the pianist 2,000 francs for these compositions he had the right to say: "These are my Preludes." Niecks is authority for the remark of Chopin: "I sold the Preludes to Pleyel because he liked them." This was in 1838, when Chopin's health demanded a change of climate; he wished to go to Majorca with George Sand and her children, and had applied for money to the piano-maker and publisher, Camille Pleyel of Paris. He received but five hundred francs in advance, the balance being paid on delivery of the manuscript. The Preludes were published in 1839, yet there is internal evidence that proves most of them had been composed before the trip to the Balearic Islands. This fact may upset the pretty legend of music-making at the monastery of Valdemoso. Have we not all read with sweet credulity the eloquent pages by George Sand in which is described the storm that overtook the novelist and her son Maurice! After terrible trials, dangers, delays, they reached home and found Chopin at the piano. Uttering a cry he arose and stared at the storm-beaten pair. "Ah! I knew well that you were dead!" It was the sixth Prelude, the one in B minor, that he played, and dreaming, as Sand writes, "that he saw himself drowned in a lake; heavy, cold drops of water fell at regular intervals on his breast; and when I called attention to those drops of water which were actually falling on the roof, he denied having heard them. He was even vexed at what I translated by the term 'imitative harmony.' He protested with all his might, and he was right, against the puerility of these imitations for the ear. His genius was full of mysterious harmonies of nature."

Yet this Prelude was composed previous to the Majorcan episode. "The Preludes," says Niecks, "consist, to a great extent at least, of pickings from the composer's portfolios, of pieces, sketches and memoranda written at various times and kept to be utilized when occasion might offer." Gutmann, a pupil who nursed Chopin to the end, declared the Preludes to have been composed before he went away with Madame Sand, and to Niecks personally Gutmann maintained that he copied all of them. Niecks, however, does not altogether credit him, as there are letters in which several of the Preludes are mentioned as being sent to Paris; so he reaches the conclusion that "Chopin's labors at Majorca on the Preludes were confined to selecting, filing and polishing." This seems a sensible solution. Robert Schumann wrote of these Preludes: "I must signalize them as most remarkable. I confess I expected something quite different, carried out in the grand style of his Studies. It is almost the contrary here; these are sketches, the beginning of studies, or, if you will, ruins, eagle's feathers, all strangely intermingled. But in every piece we find in his own hand—'Frédéric Chopin wrote it.' One recognizes him in his pauses, in his impetuous respiration. He is the boldest, the proudest, poet-soul of his time. To be sure, the book also contains some morbid, feverish, repellent traits, but let every one look in it for something that will enchant him. Philistines, however, must keep away."

It was in these Preludes that Ignaz Moscheles first comprehended Chopin and his methods of execution. The German pianist had found his music harsh and dilettantish in modulation, but Chopin's original performance—"he glides lightly over the keys in a fairy-like way with his delicate fingers"—quite reconciled the elder man to this strange music. To Liszt the Preludes are too modestly named, but he dwells too much on Chopin's "marked irritability and exhaustion." Liszt, as usual, erred on the side of sentimentality. Chopin, essentially a man of moods, like many great poets, cannot always be pinned down to any particular period. Several of the Preludes are morbid, as is some of his early music, while just before his death he seems quite gay. "The Preludes follow out no technical idea, are free creations on a small basis and exhibit the musician in all his versatility . . . much is embryonic . . . Often it is as though they were small falling-stars dissolved into tones as they fall." Thus Louis Ehlert. Jean Kleczynski thinks that "people have gone too far in seeking in the Preludes for traces of the misanthropy and weariness of life to which he was a prey during his sojourn in Majorca," and asks if the D minor, the last Prelude of the series, is not strong and energetic, "concluding as it does with three cannon-shots." The truth is, Niecks is right. Mr. Henry James, always an admirer of Madame

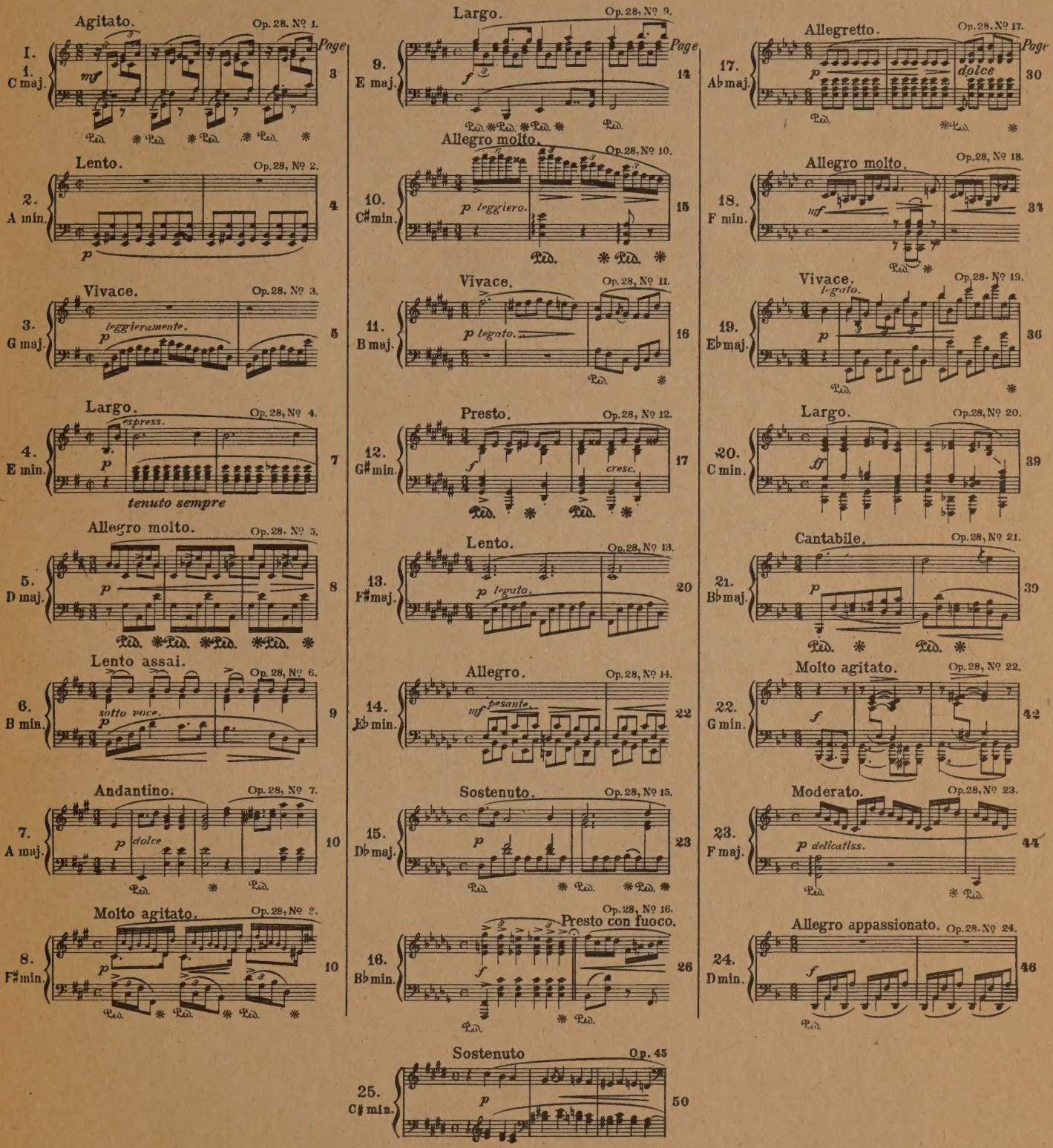
of revolt and conflict. The impetuosity of this largely moulded piece in G minor, its daring harmonies—read the seventeenth and eighteenth bars—and sharply-cut dramatic profile make it a worthy companion to the F minor Prelude. Technically considered, it serves as an octave study for the left hand. In the next Prelude, No. 23, in F, Chopin attempted a most audacious feat in harmony (or is it a happy misprint?). An E flat in the bass of the third group of sixteenths leaves the entire composition enigmatically floating in thin air. It deliciously colors the close, evoking a sense of anticipation and suspense; it must have pressed hard on Philistine ears. This Prelude is fashioned from the most volatile stuff. Aerial, imponderable, and like a sun-shot spider-web oscillating in the breeze of summer, its hues change at every puff of air. It is in extended harmonies and must be spiritually interpreted. We have now reached the last Prelude of opus 28. In D minor, it is sonorously tragic, troubled by fevered visions, and capricious, irregular, yet massive in design. It must be placed among Chopin's greater works. The bass requires an unusual span and the thumb of the right hand may eke out the weakness of the left in the case of a small stretch. Like the vast reverberation of monster waves on the implacable coast of a remote world is this Prelude. Despite its fatalistic ring it is not dispiriting. Its issues are more impersonal, more elemental than the other Preludes. It is a veritable *Appassionata*, but its theme is cosmical and no longer behind the closed doors of Chopin's soul. The three tones at the close seem like the final clangor of overthrown reason. After the subjects reappear in C minor there is a shift to D flat; and for a moment a point of repose is achieved; but this rest is elusive. The theme comes back to the tonic and in octaves, and the tension is greater. Then the accumulated passion dissolves in a fierce gust of double chromatic thirds and octaves and breathless arpeggios. In its pride and scorn this powerful Prelude is at times repellent, but in it I discern no vestige of hysteria. It is as strong, as human, as Beethoven.

The separate Prelude, opus 45, begins with an idea which sounds like Mendelssohn's "Regret" in one of his Songs without Words; but at the thirteenth bar of the Prelude we are landed in the atmosphere of Brahms, the Brahms of the second period, the bitter-sweet lingering, the spiritual reverie in which the music is gently propelled as in a dream. There are the widely extended basses, the shifting harmonic hues, even the bars seem built on Brahmsian lines. Chopin anticipating Brahms is in the nature of a delicate, ironical jest. Of course Brahms owes Chopin little or nothing after his own early E flat minor Scherzo; to Schumann he is more genuinely indebted. The moods of this Prelude are elusive; recondite it is, and not music for the multitude.

Niecks does not think that Chopin created a new type in the Preludes. "They are too unlike each other in form and character," he wrote. Yet, notwithstanding the fleeting, evanescent moods there is a certain unity of feeling and contrasted tonalities, the grouping done in approved Bach-ian order. As if wishing to exhibit his genius in perspective he carved these cameos with exceeding fineness. In a few of them the idea overflows the form; but the majority are exquisite examples of manner and matter, a true blending of voice and vision. Even in the microscopic ones the tracery, like the spirals in exotic sea-shells, is measured. Much in miniature are these sculptured Preludes of the Polish poet.

James Huneker

Thematic Index.

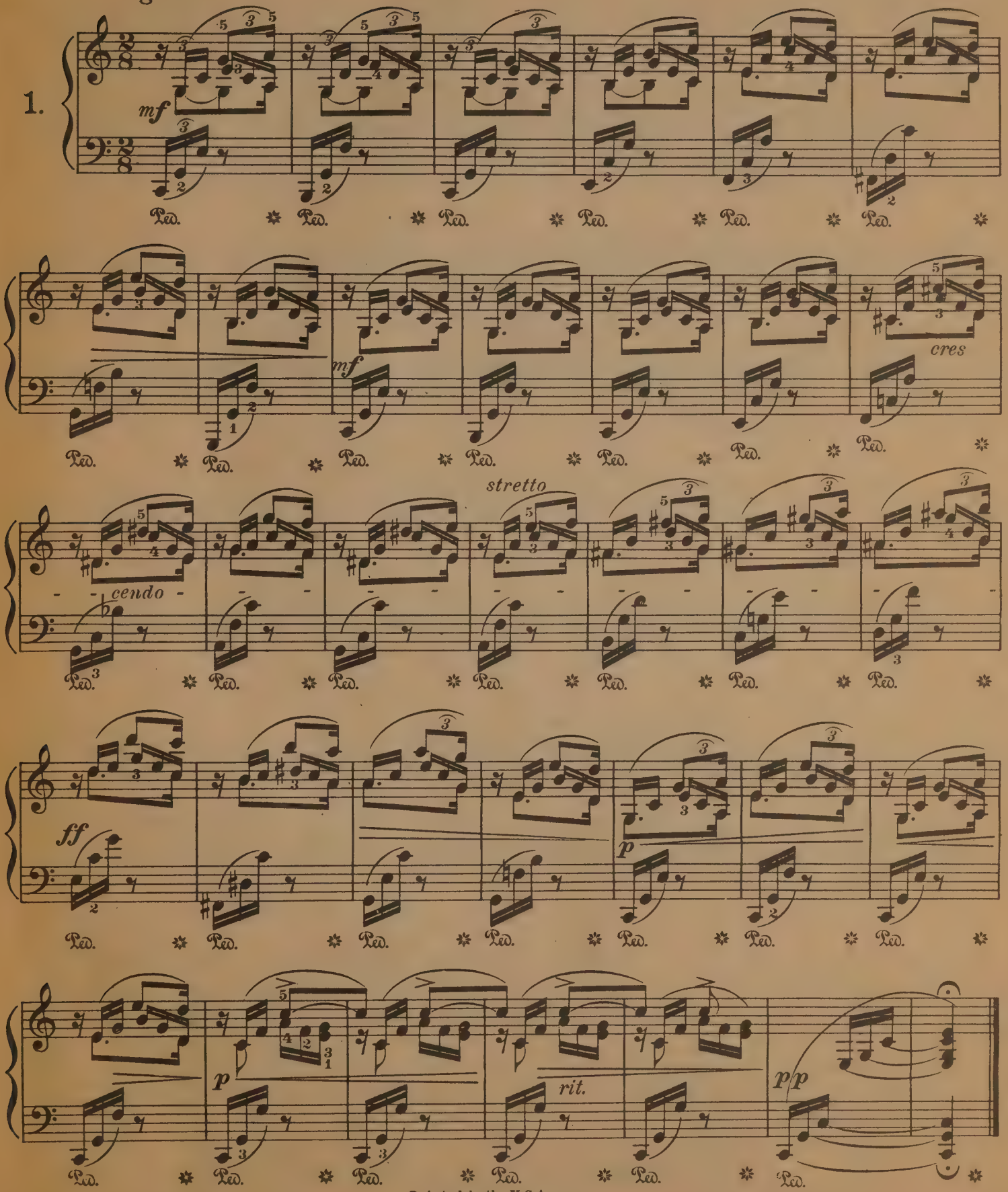
Preludes

PRELUDES

Edited and fingered by
Rafael Joseffy

Prélude

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 1

Agitato



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Prélude

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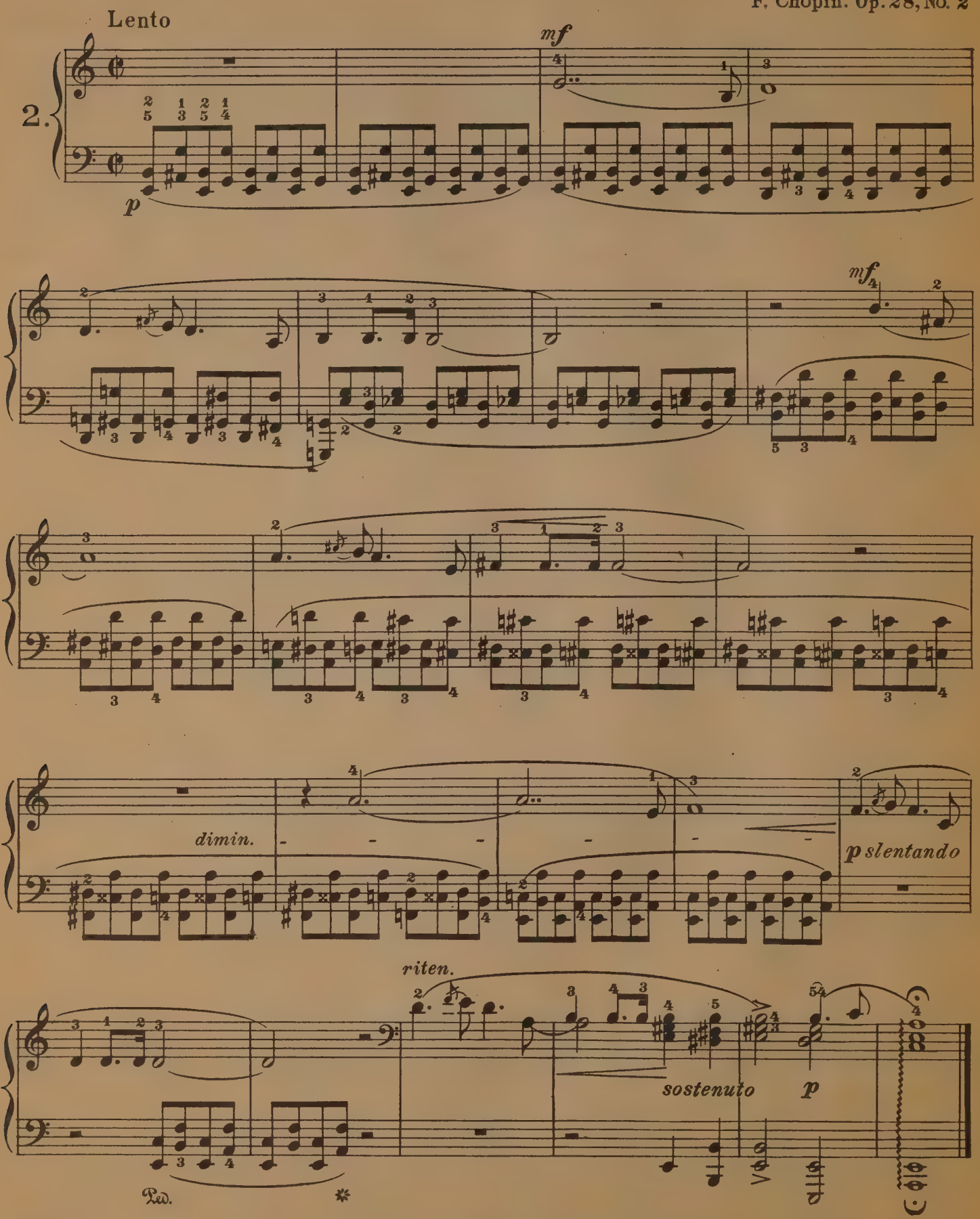
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 2



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Prélude

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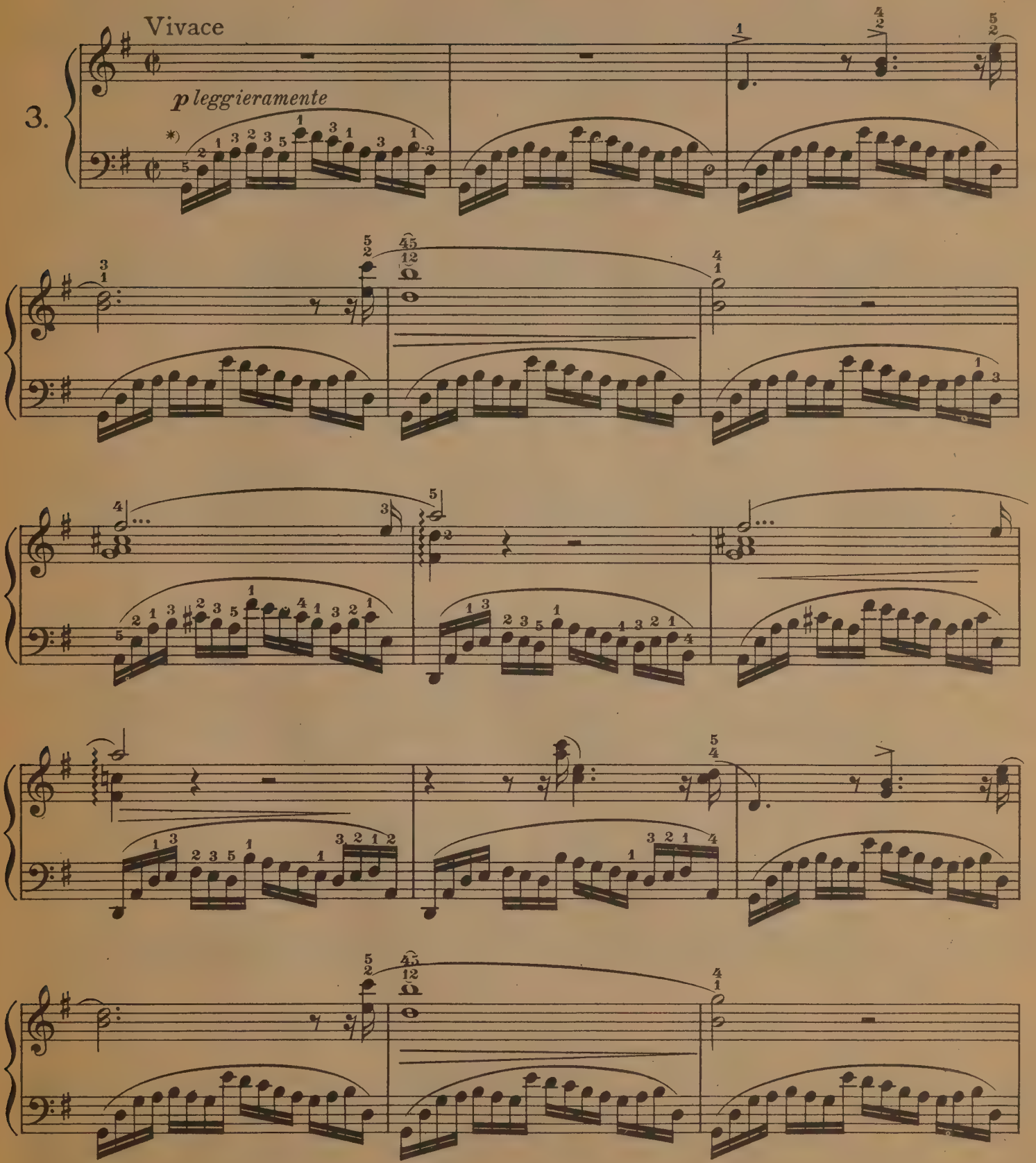
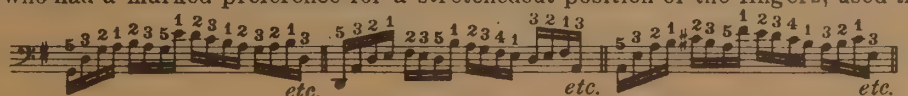
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 3

*) Carl Tausig, who had a marked preference for a stretchedout position of the fingers, used the following fingering:



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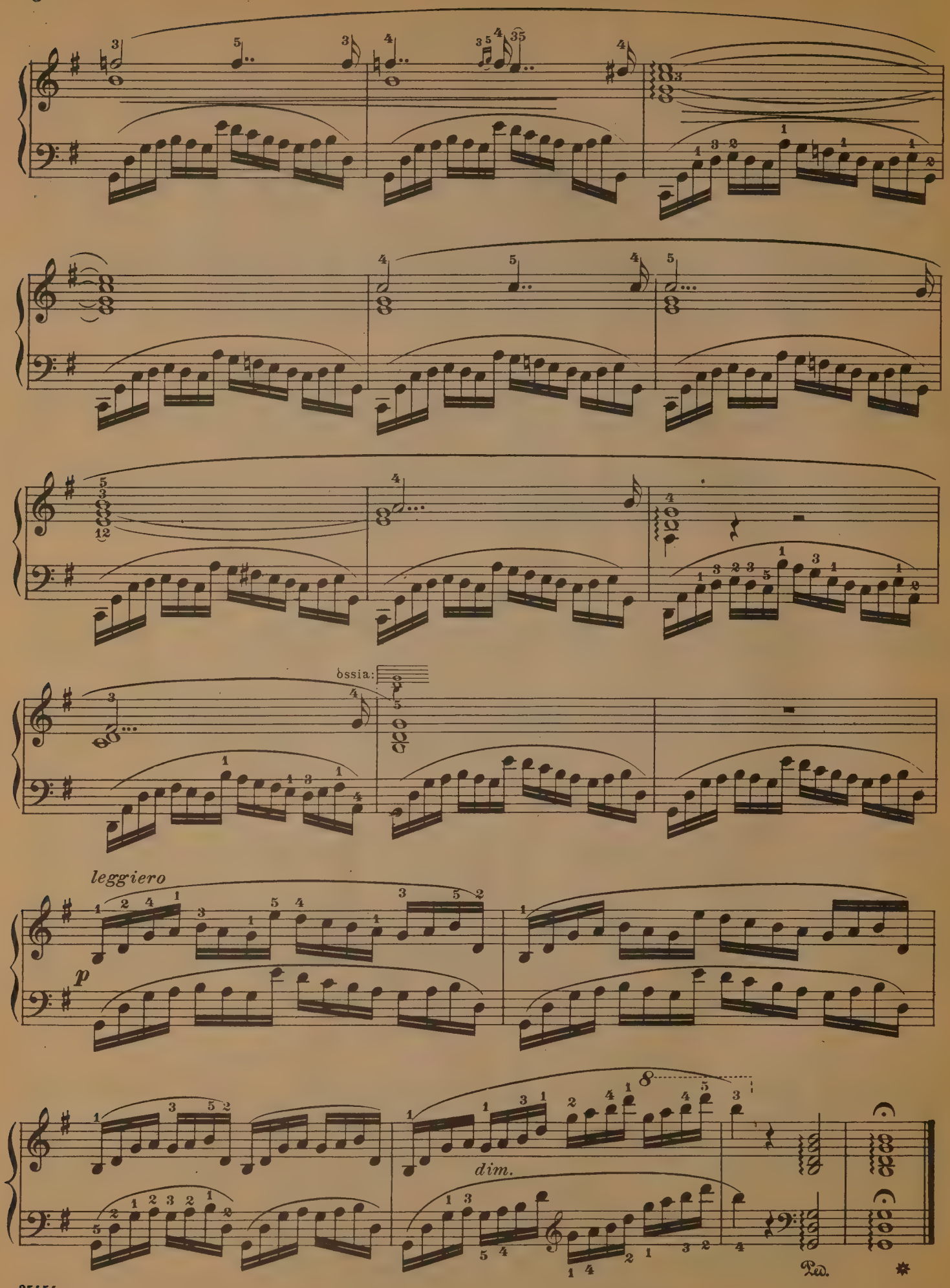
ossia:
leggiero
p
dim.
Ped.

Prélude

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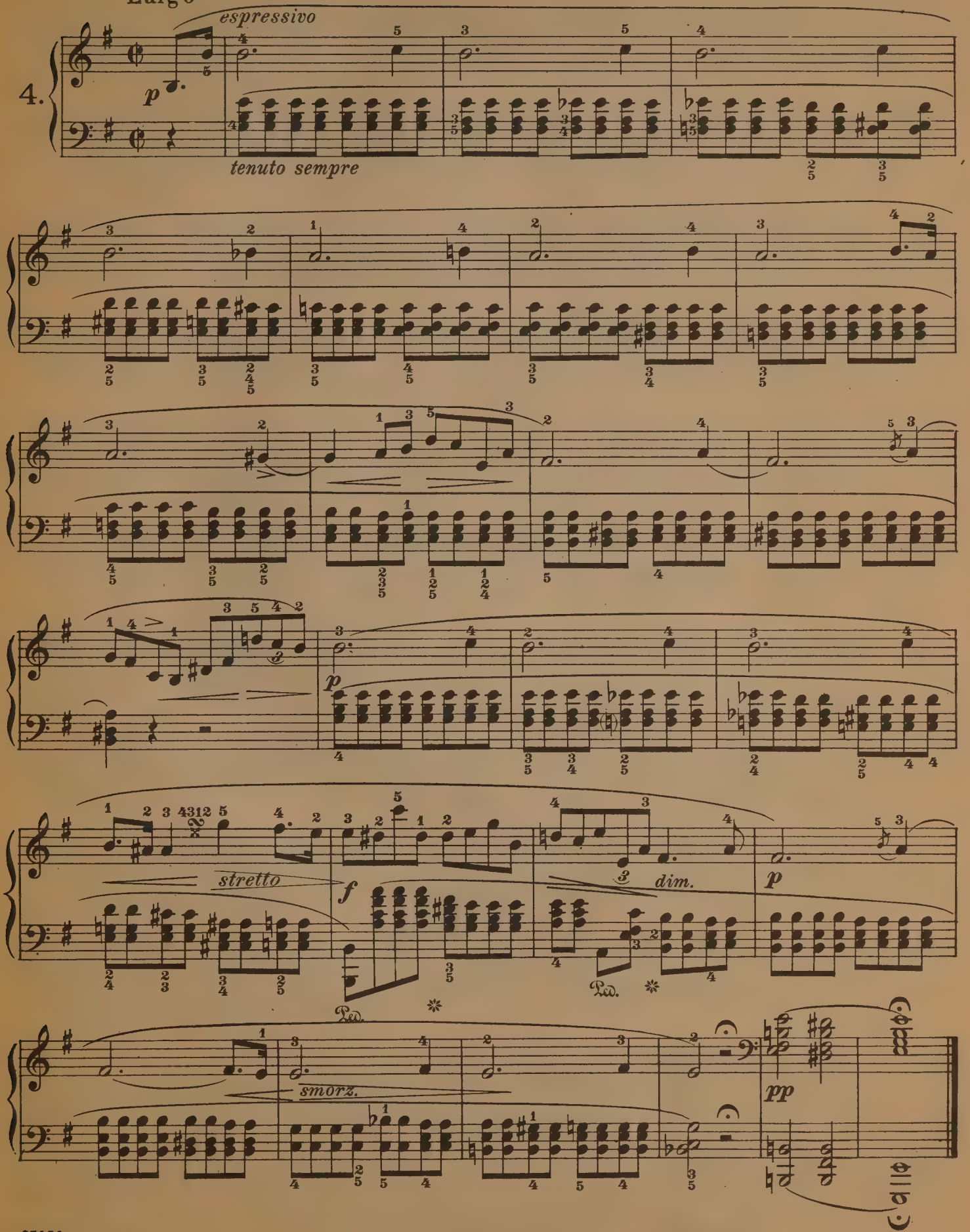
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 4

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Prélude

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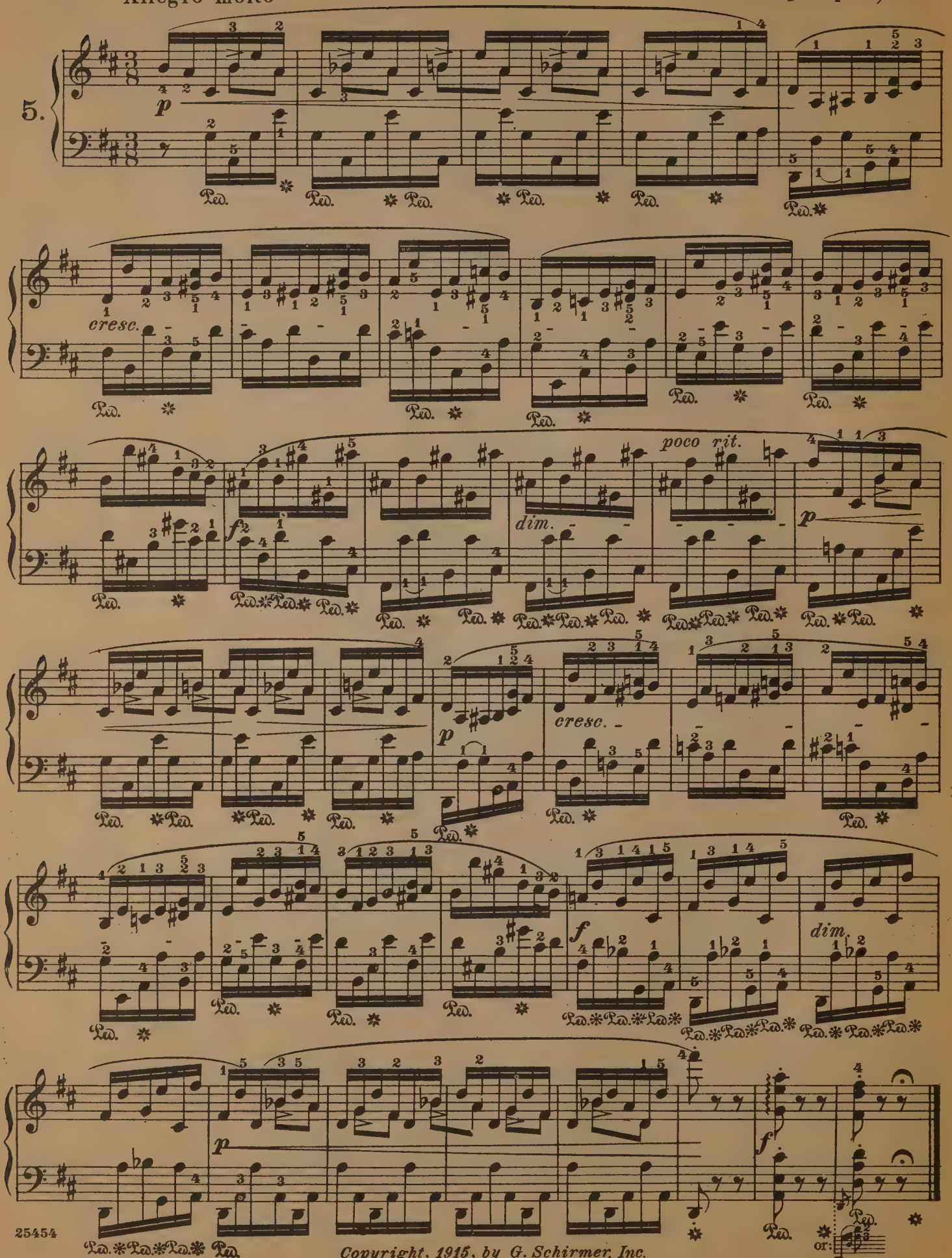
Allegro molto

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 5



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Prélude

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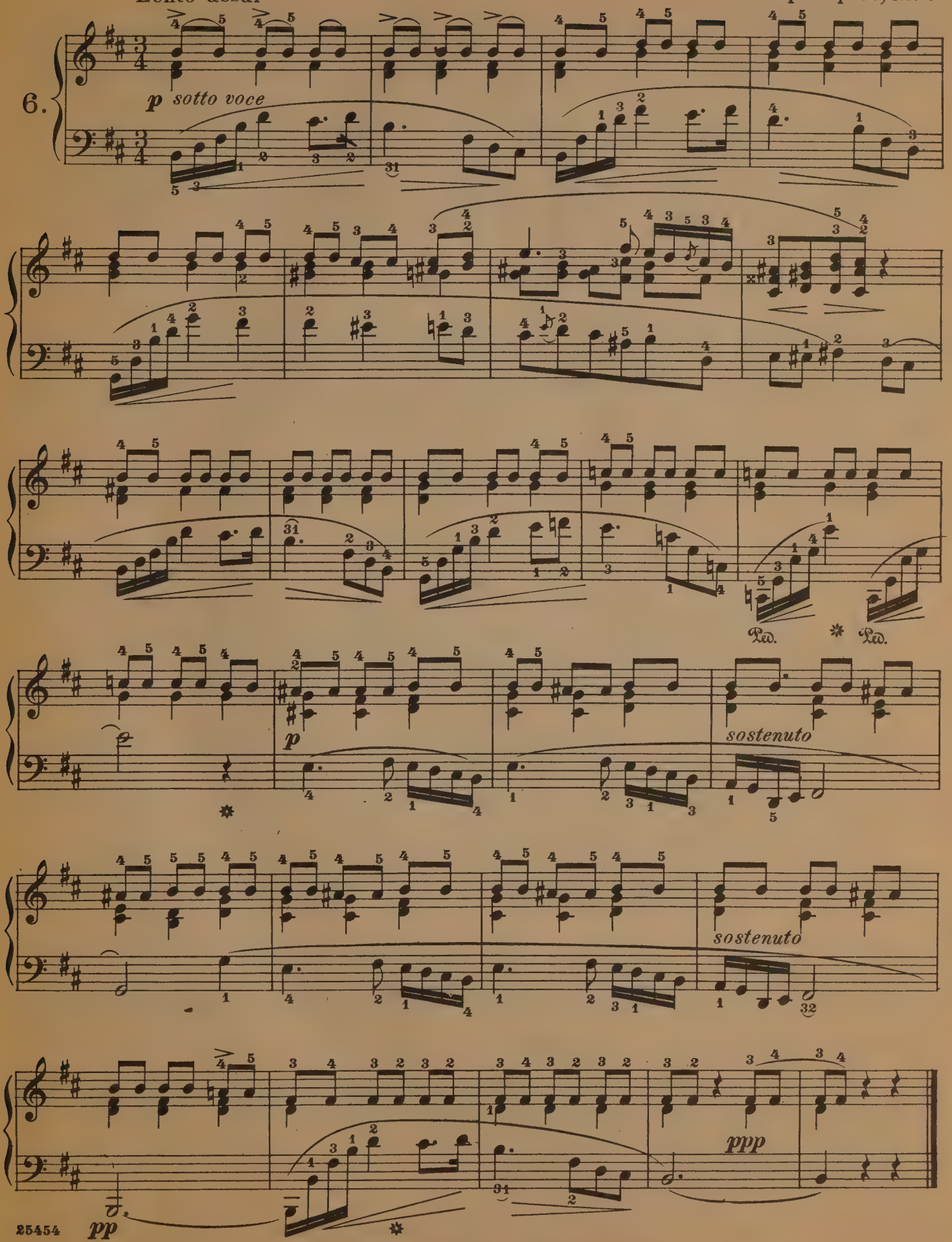
Lento assai

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 6



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Prélude

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F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 7

Andantino

7.

p dolce

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

*) Klindworth

Prélude

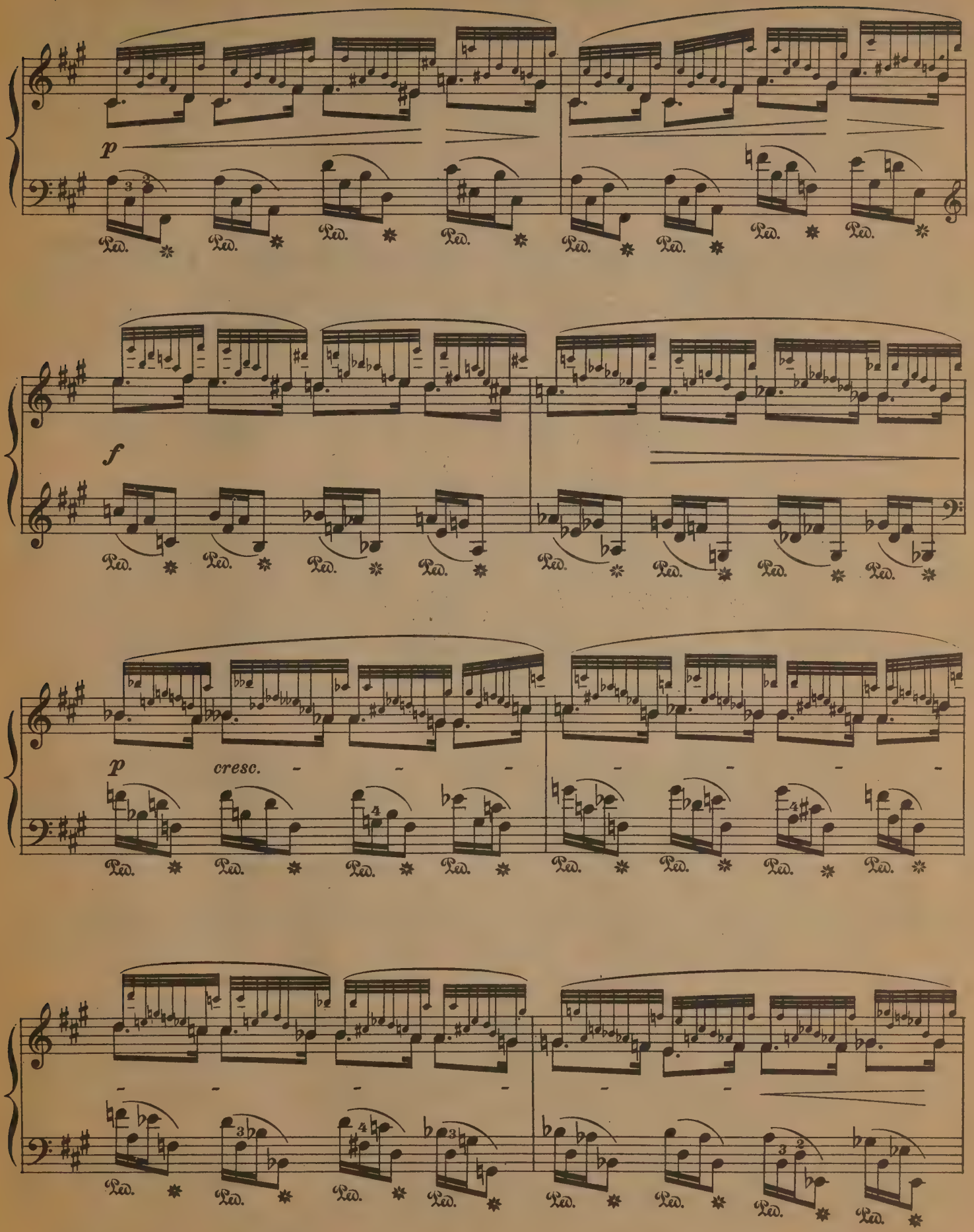
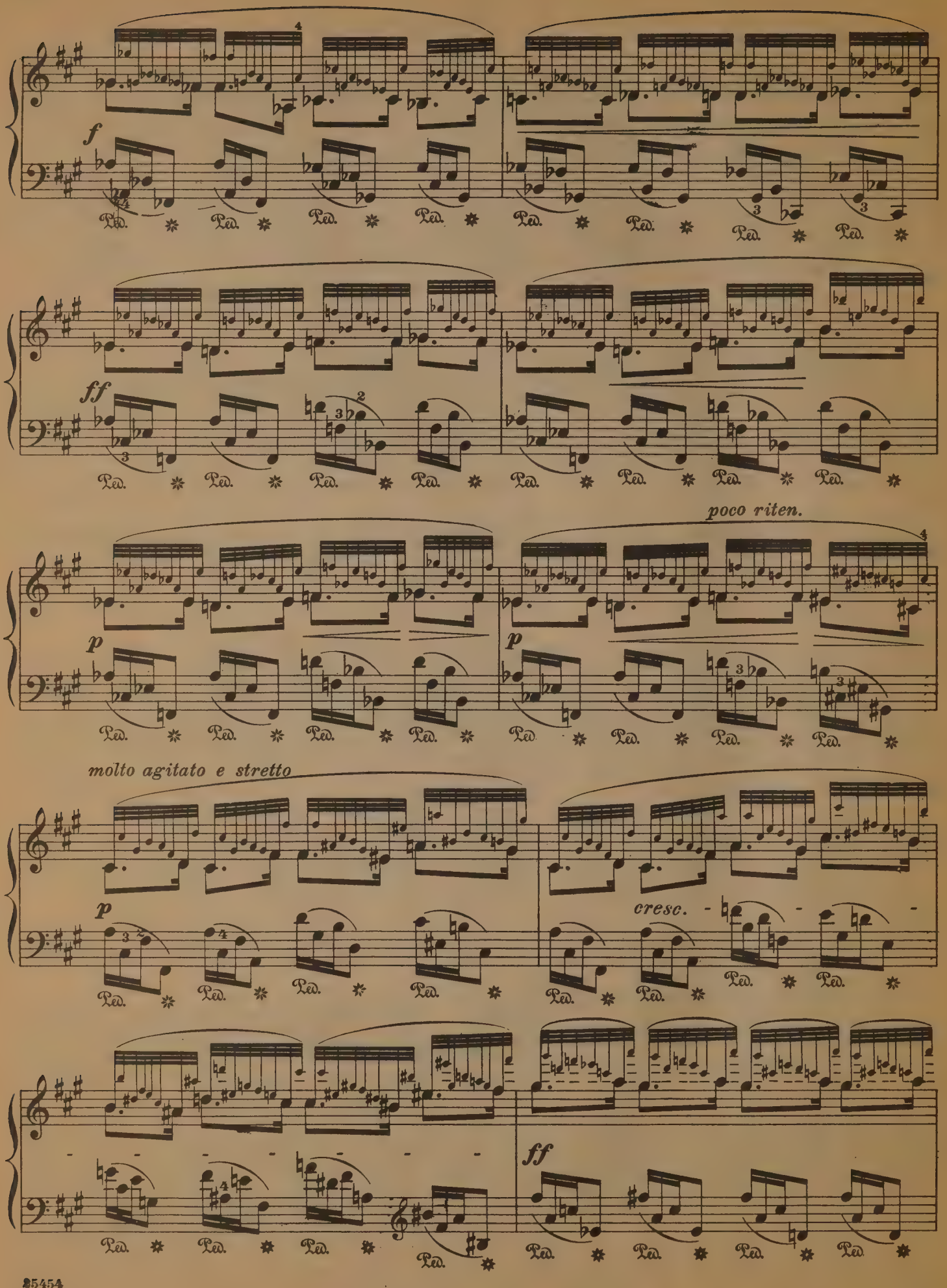
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 8

Molto agitato

8.

p

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *


p
Ped.
f
p
cresc.

f
ff
poco riten.
p
molto agitato e stretto
cresc.
ff
Ped.

*) più dim.

mf dim.

p poco cresc.

pp

lento

p

*)

Prélude

Edited and fingered by
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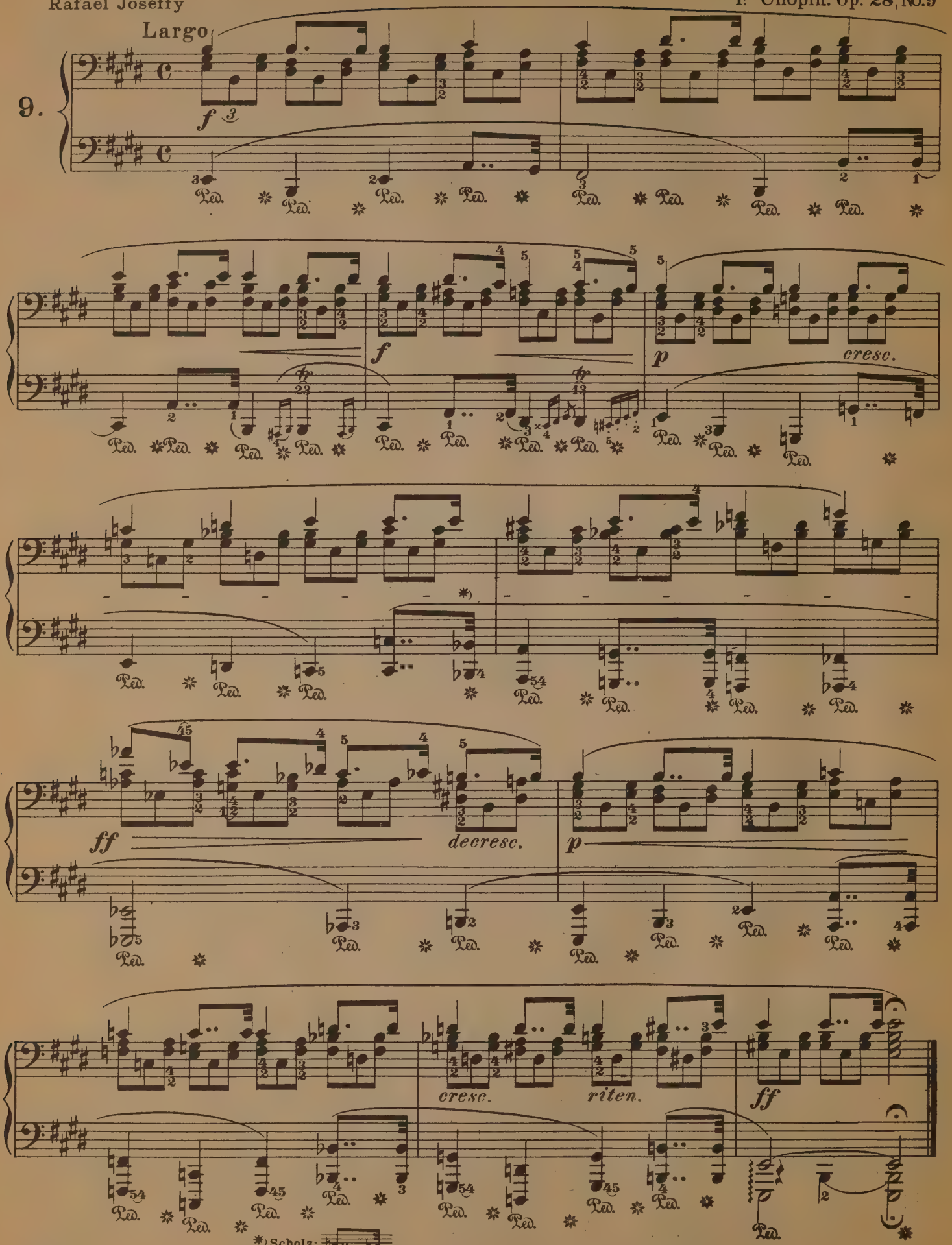
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No.9



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Prélude

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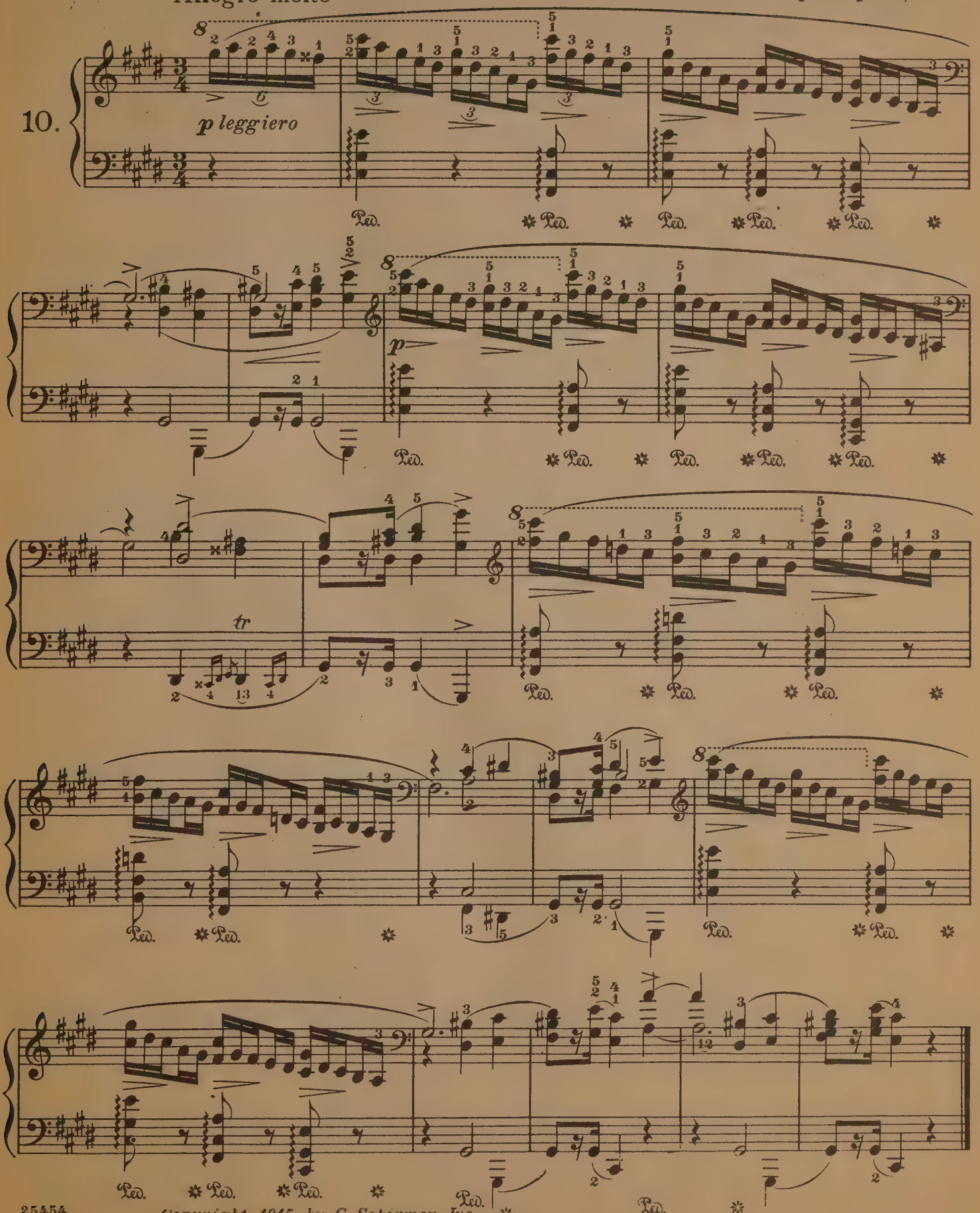
Allegro molto

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 10



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Prélude

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 11

Vivace

11.

p legato

p

mf

f

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Prélude

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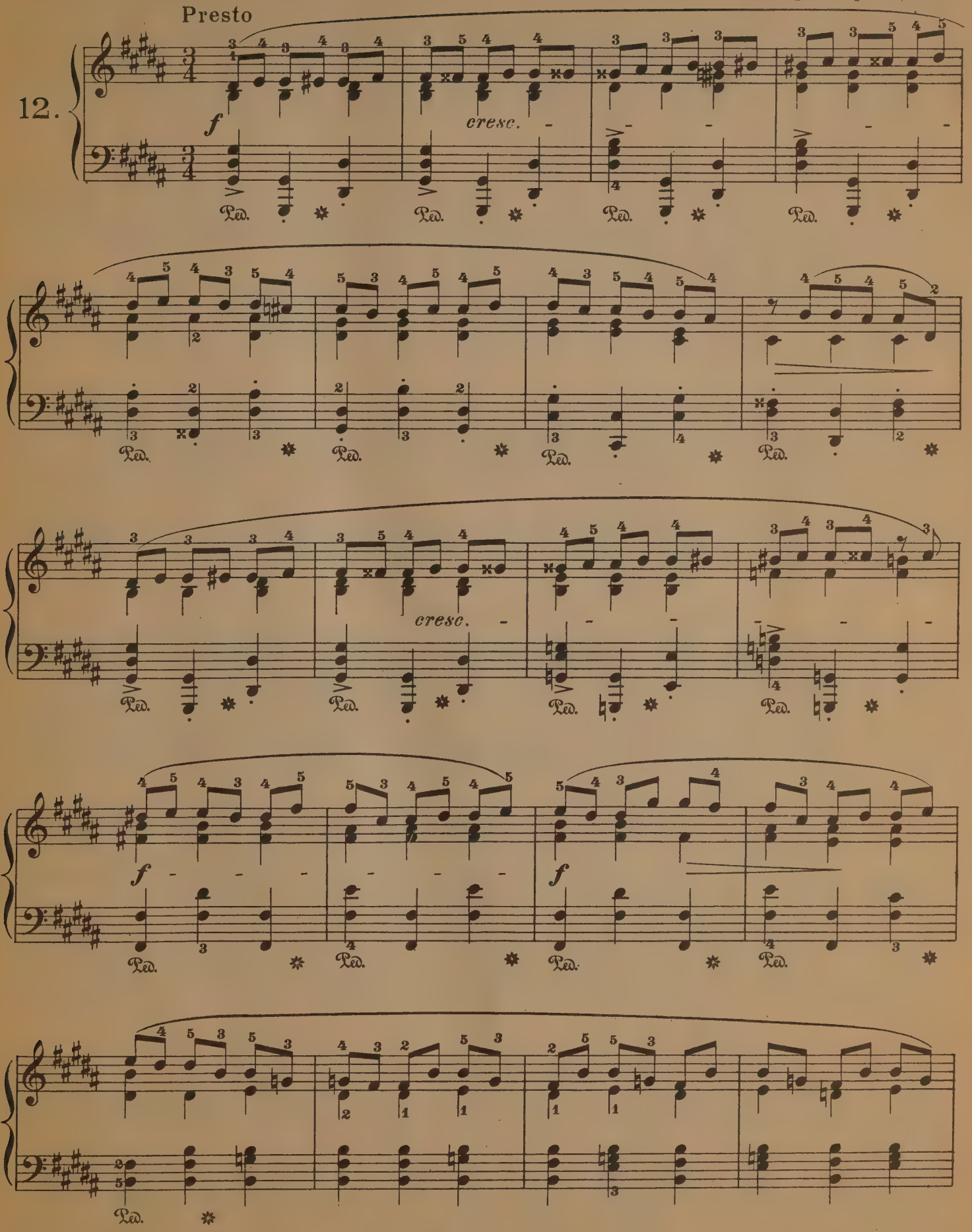
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 12

Presto



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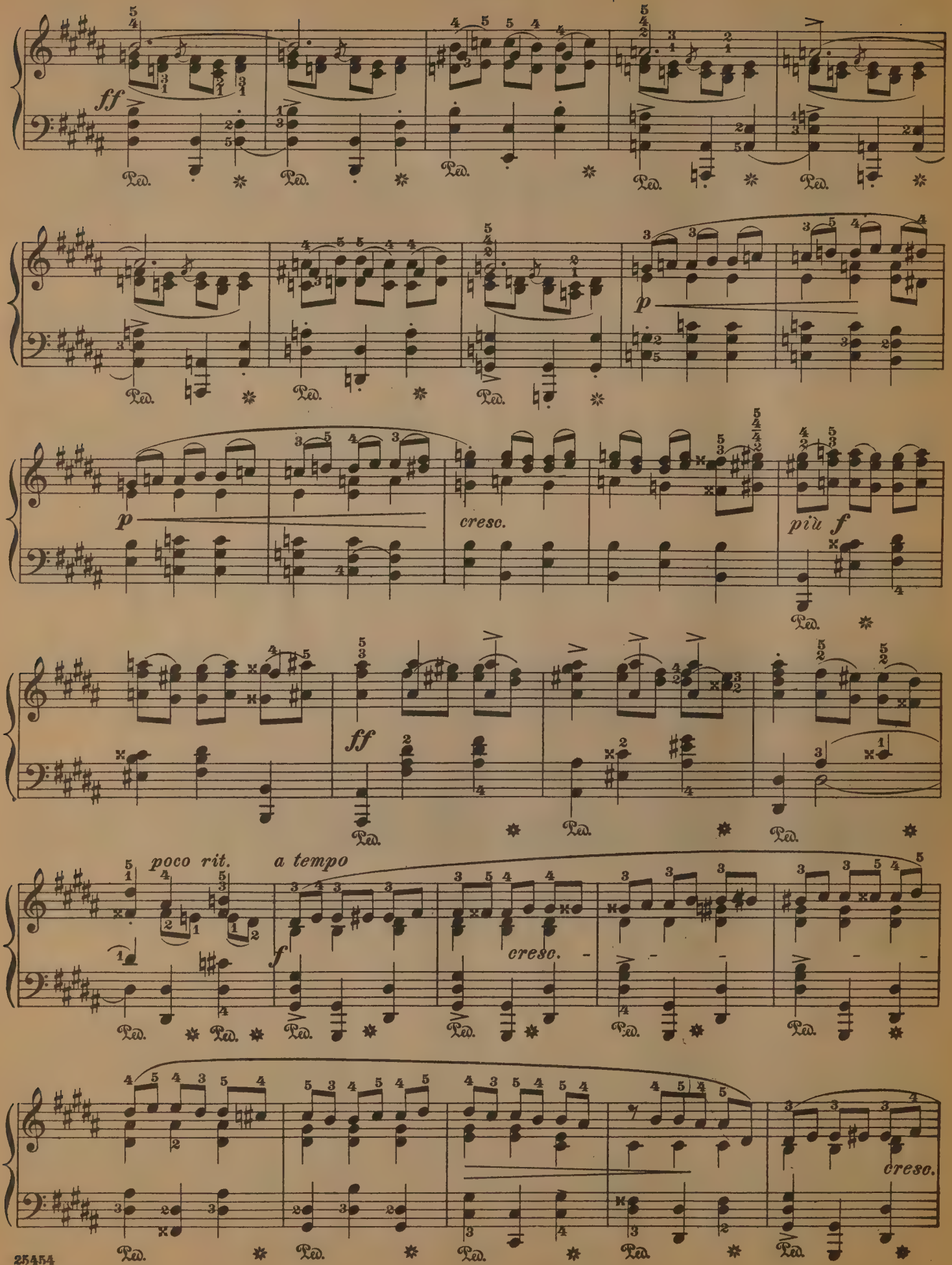
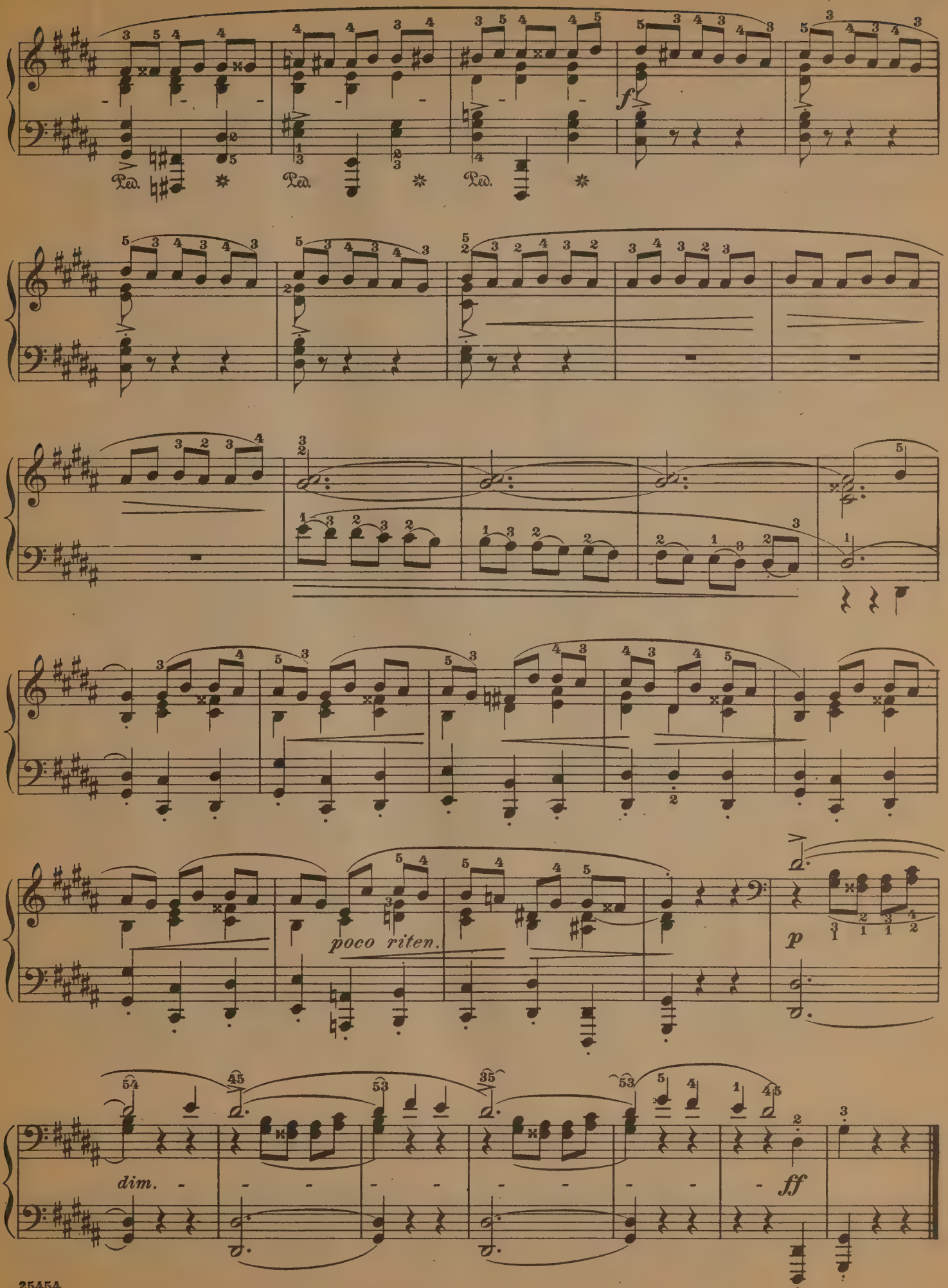

ff
Ped.
p
cresc.
più f
ff
poco rit.
a tempo
f
cresc.


Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
f
poco riten.
p
dim.
ff

Prélude

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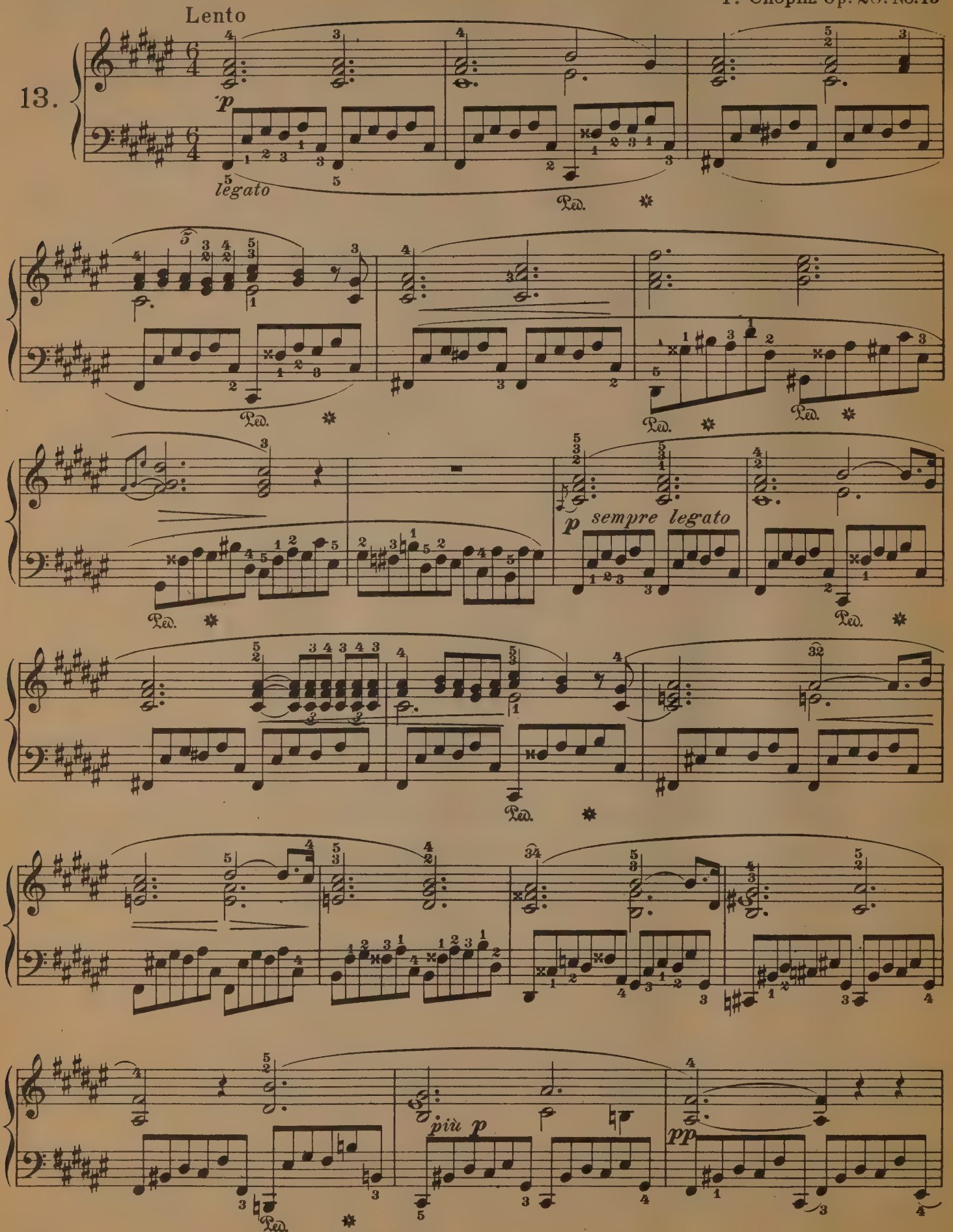
F. Chopin. Op. 28. No. 13



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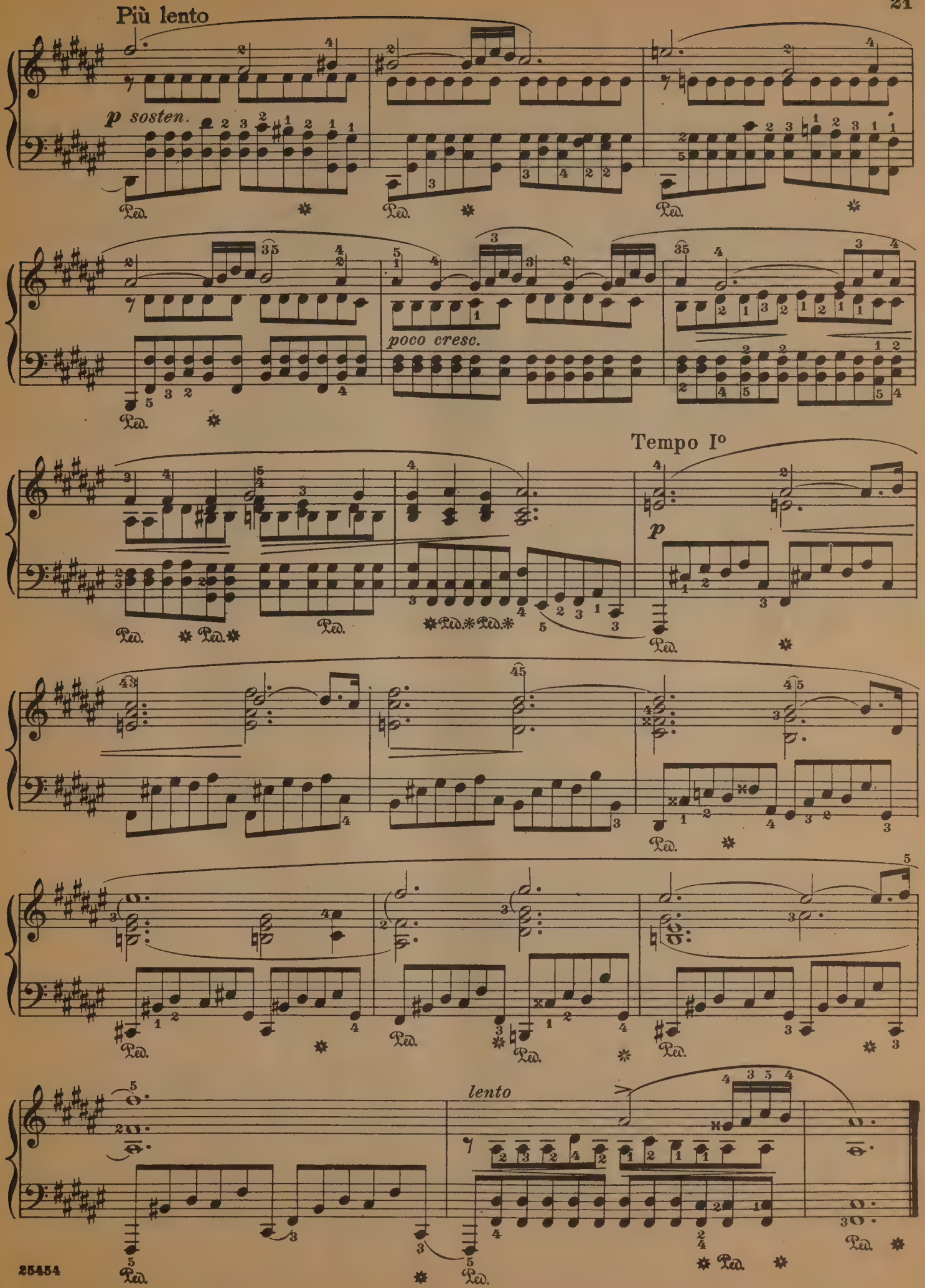
Più lento
p sosten.
poco cresc.
Tempo Io
p
lento

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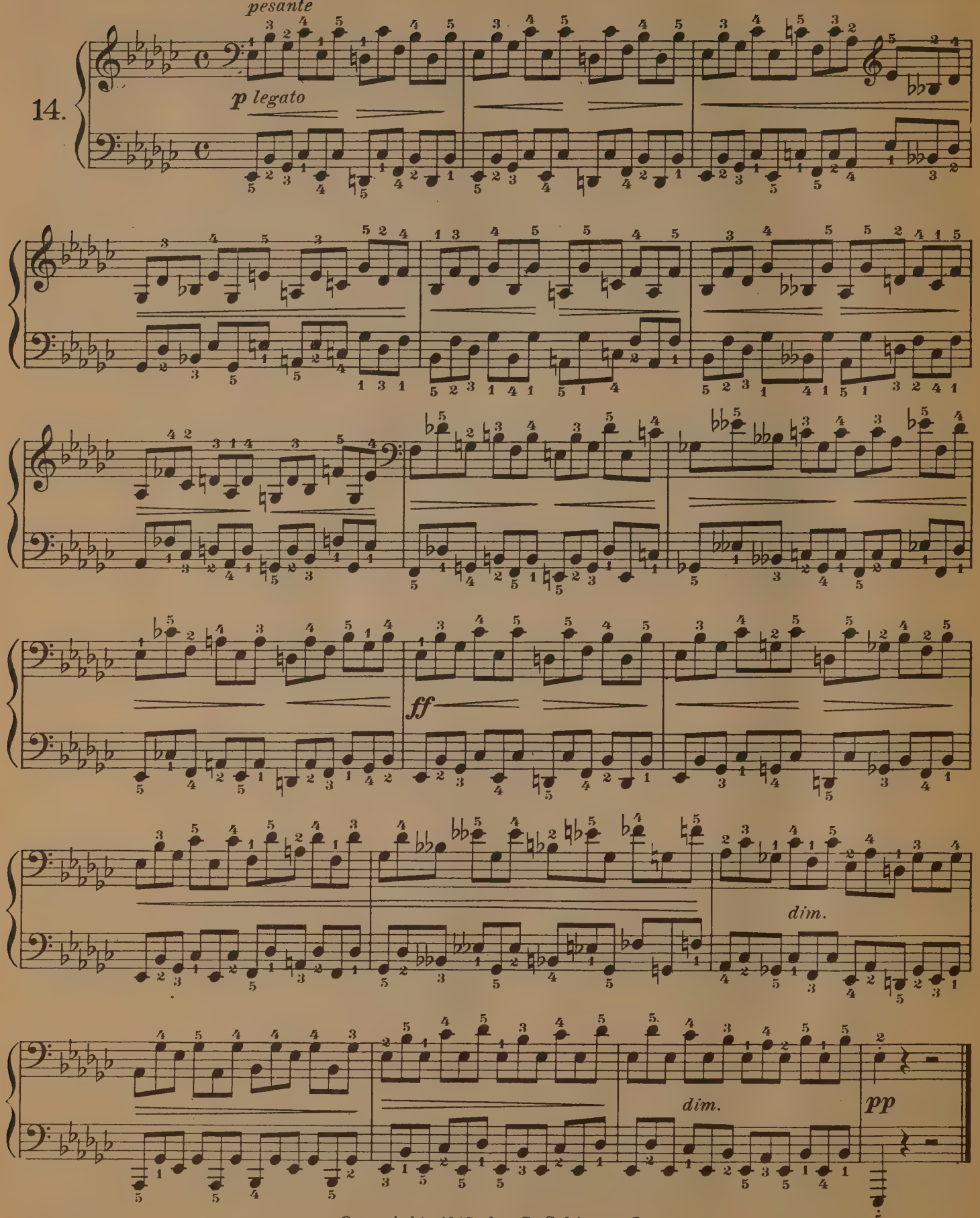
Prélude

Allegro

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 14

14.



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Prélude

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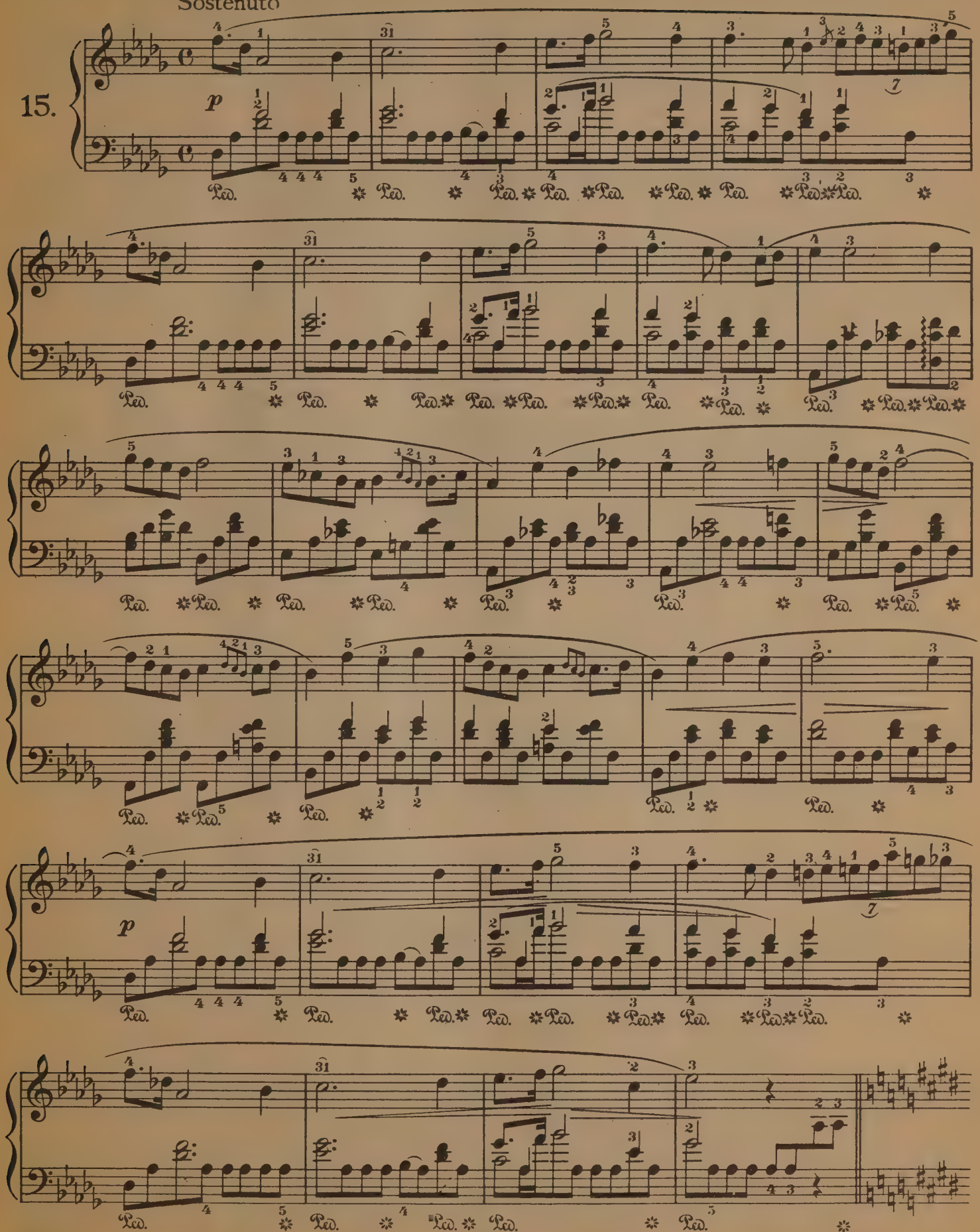
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 15

Sostenuto



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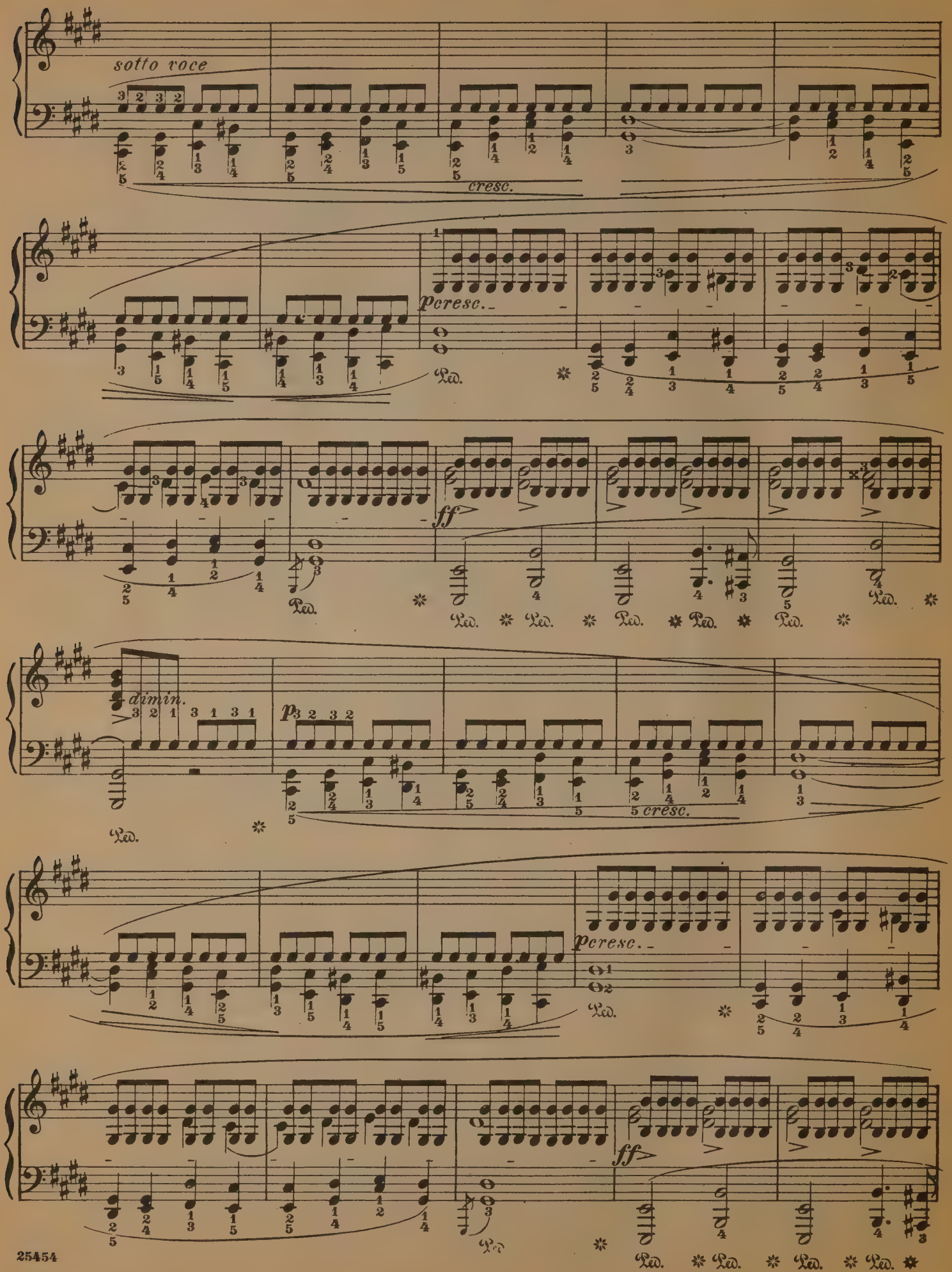
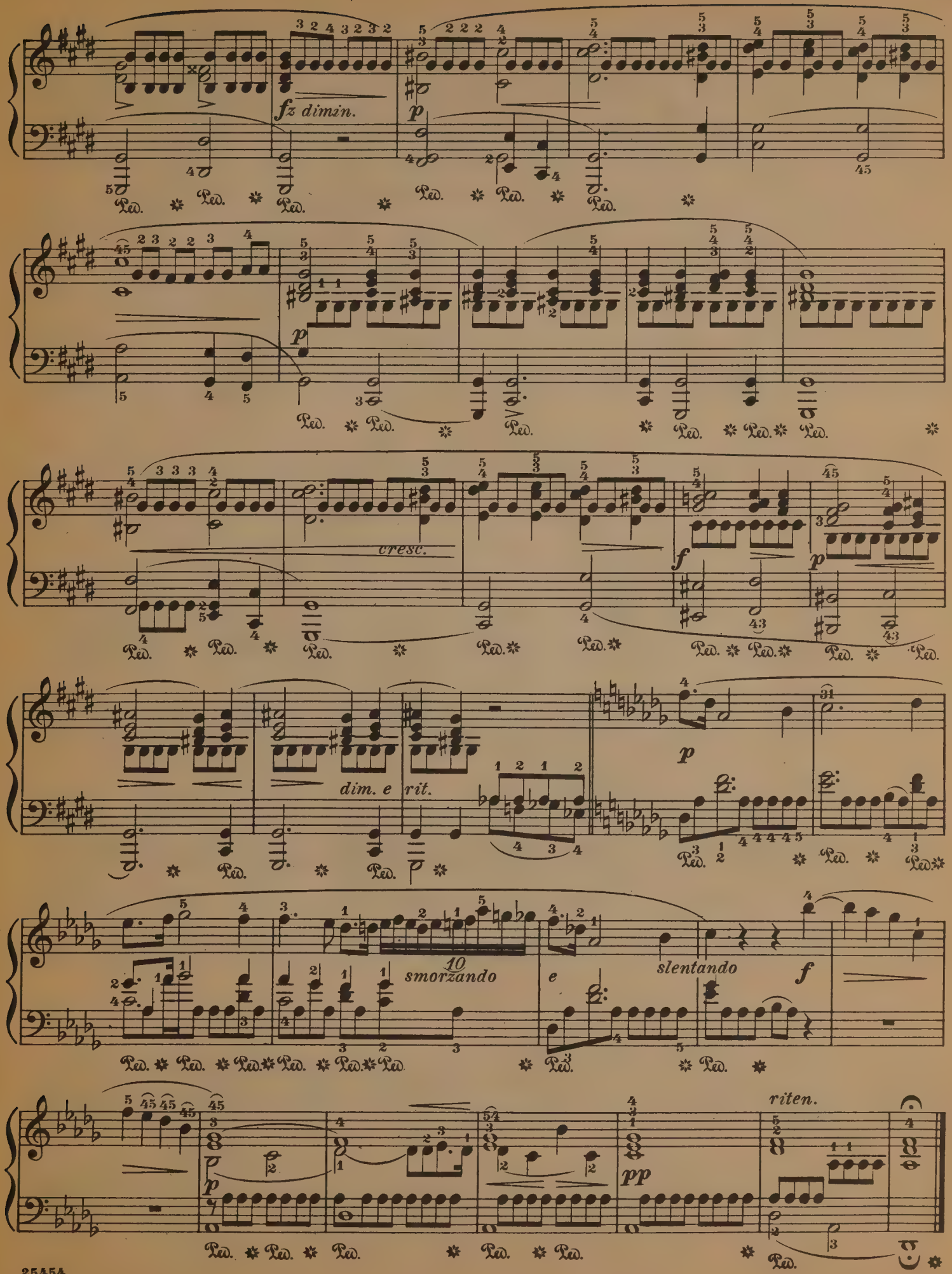

sotto voce
cresc.
pcresc.
ff
dimin.
p
cresc.
pcresc.
ff
Ped.


fz dimin.
p
cresc.
f
p
dim. e rit.
p
10
smorzando
e
slentando
f
riten.
pp

Prélude

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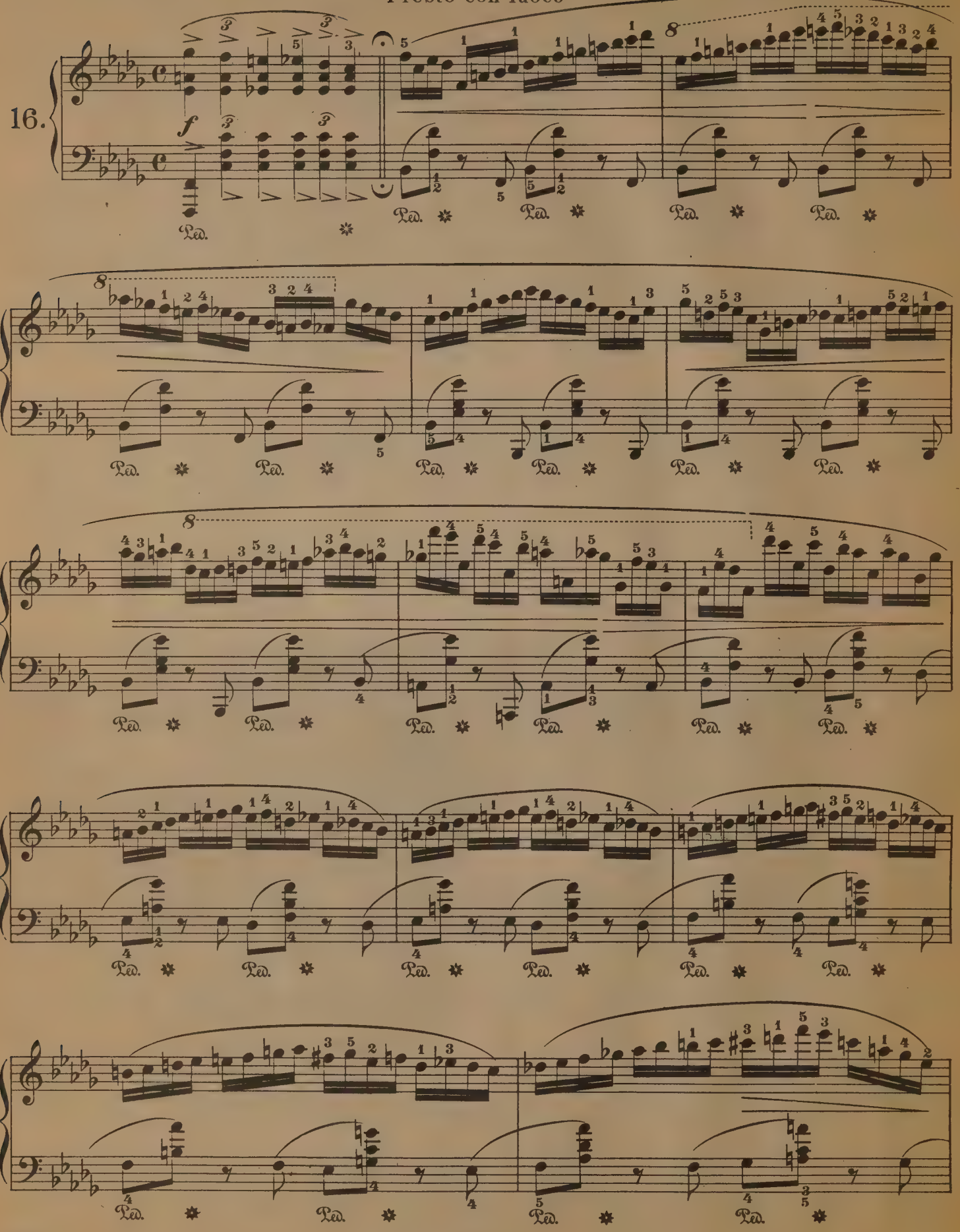
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No.16

Presto con fuoco



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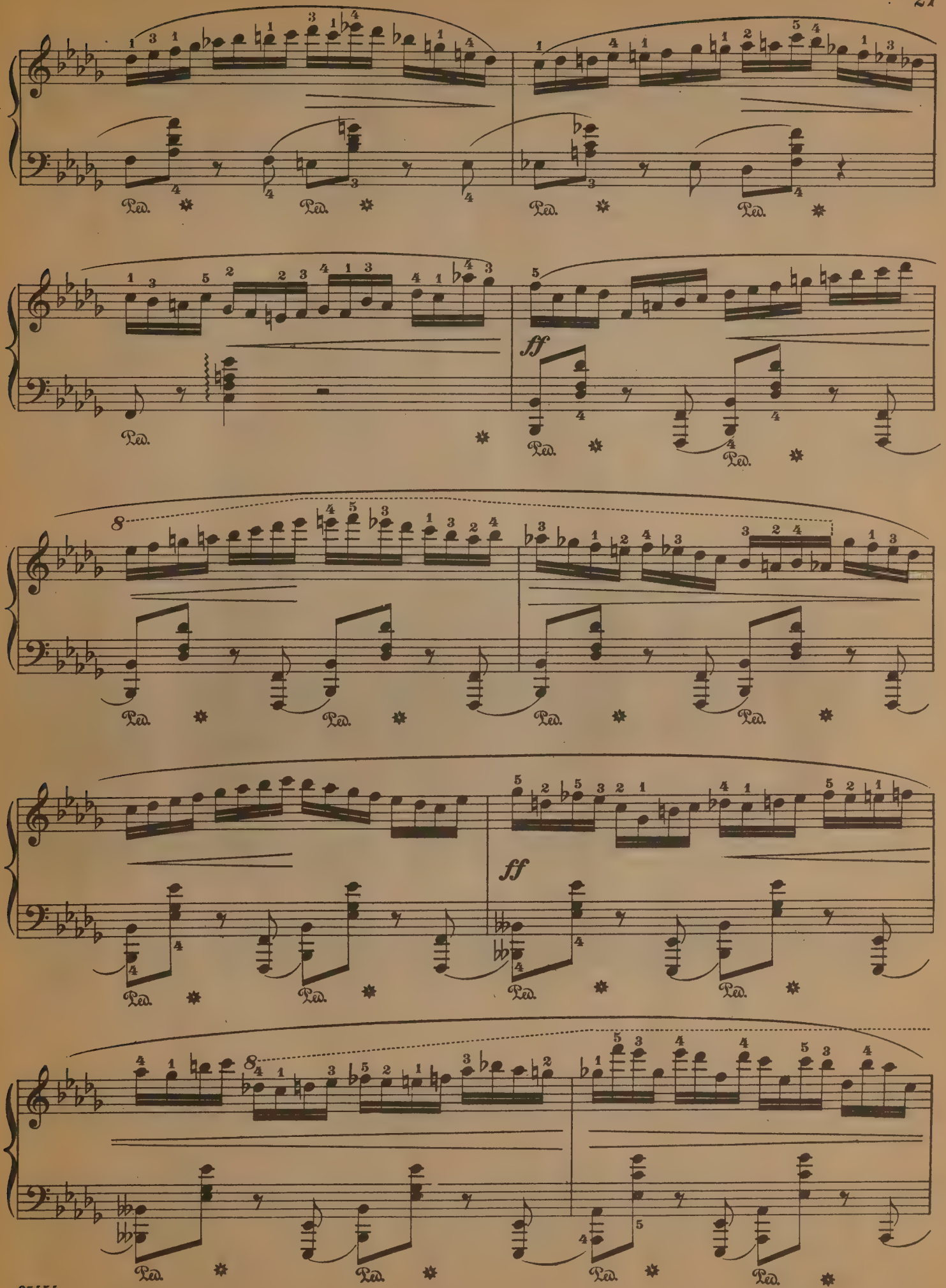
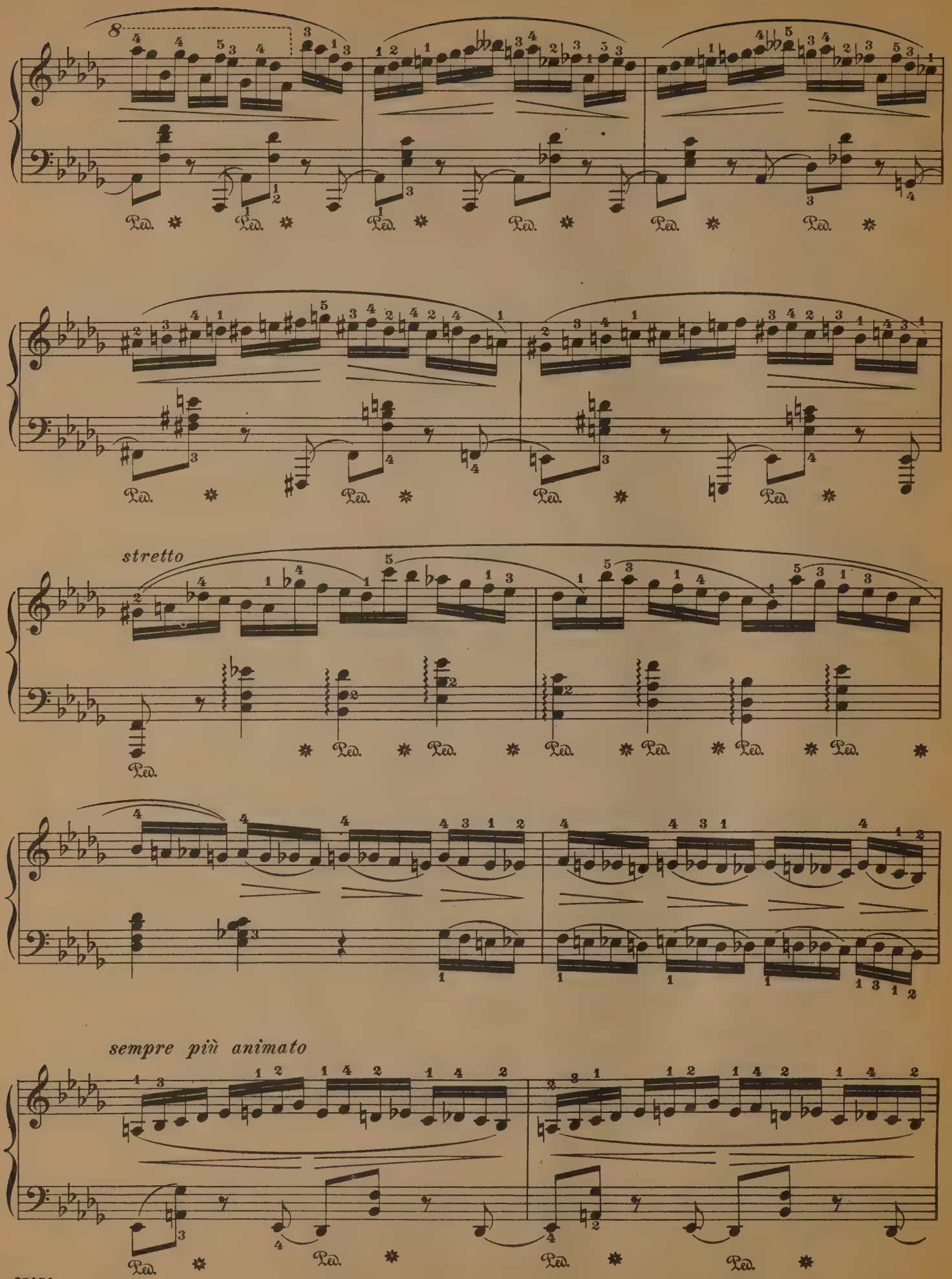
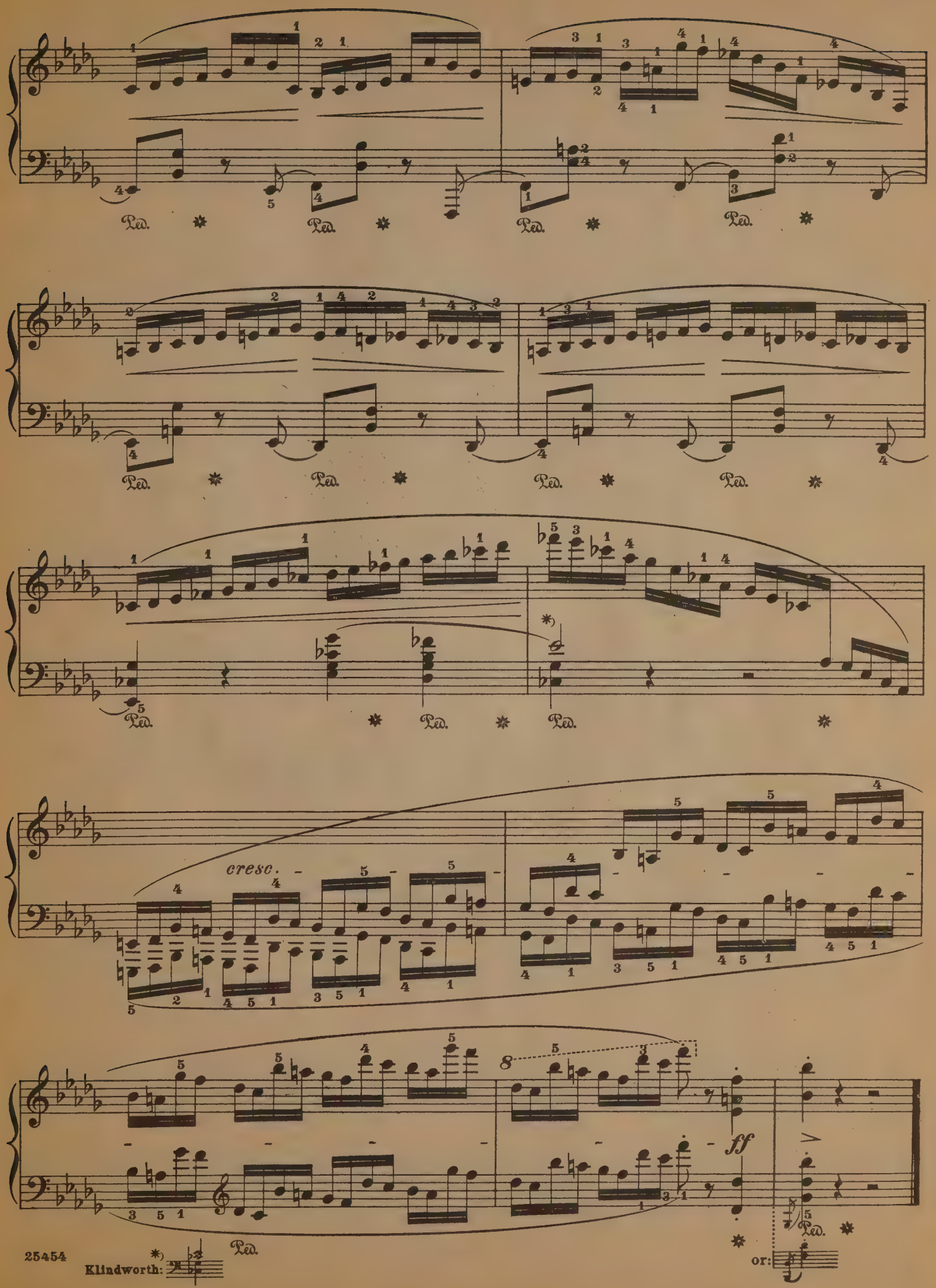

ff
ff


stretto
sempre più animato



Klindworth:

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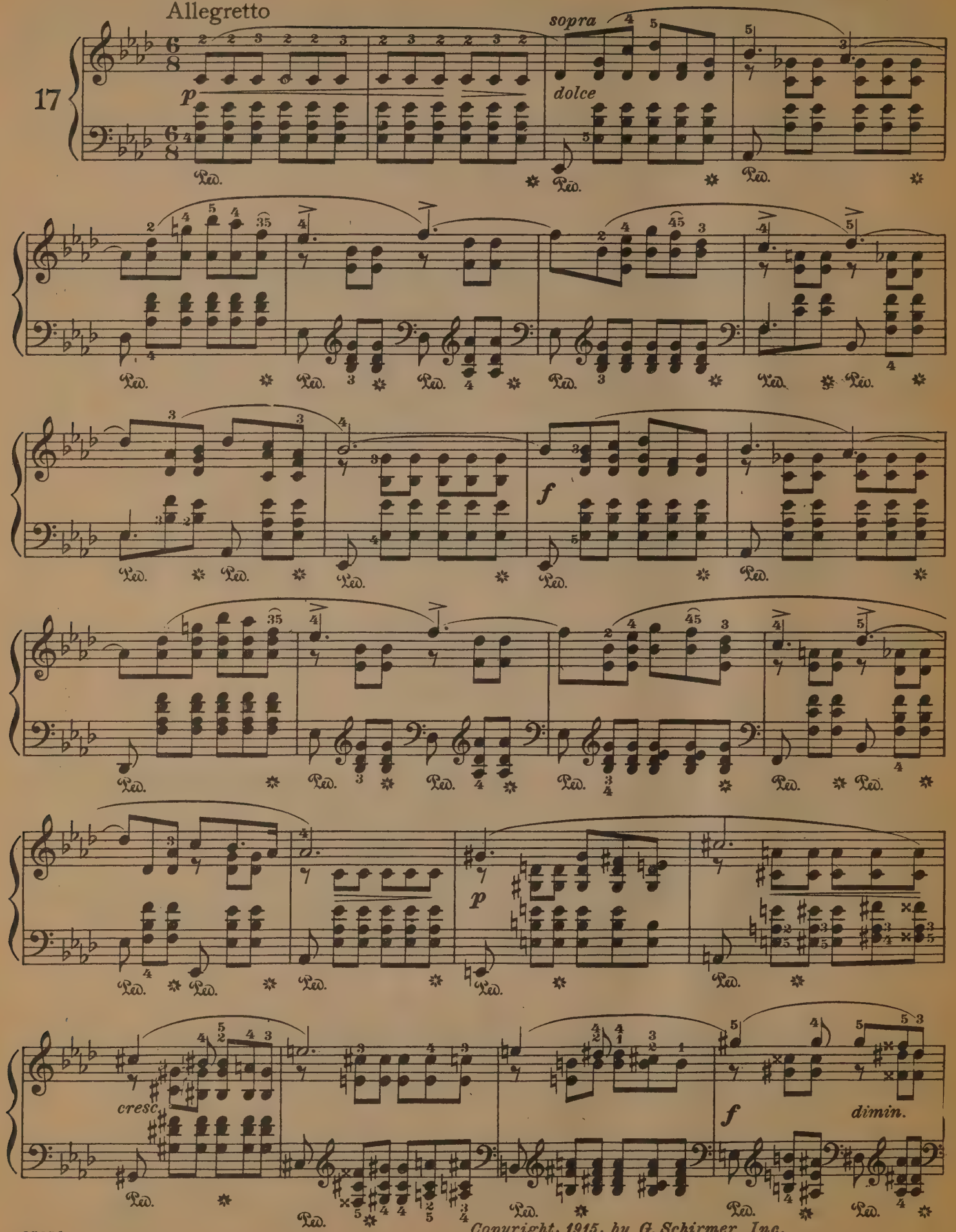
Prélude

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 17

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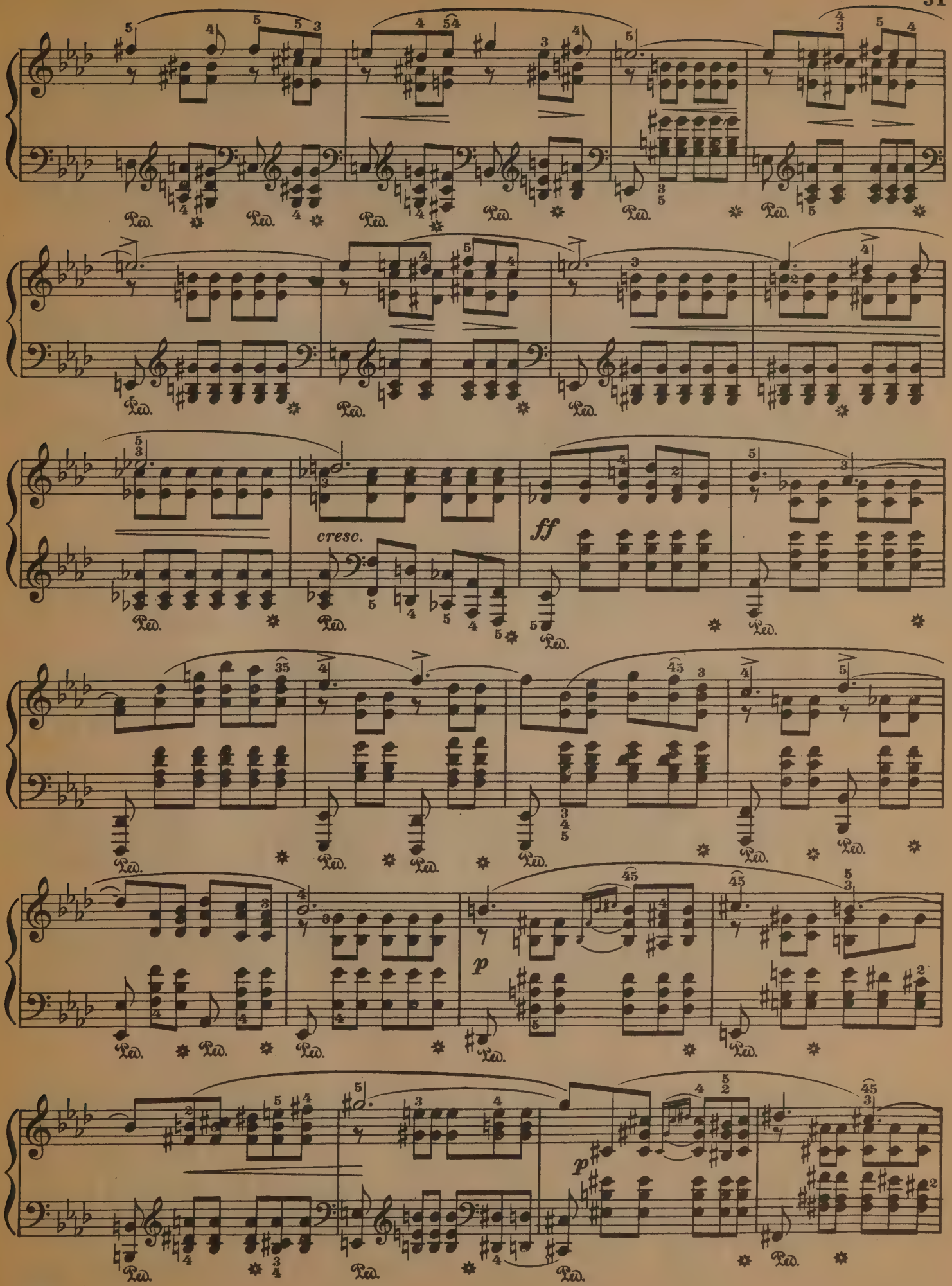
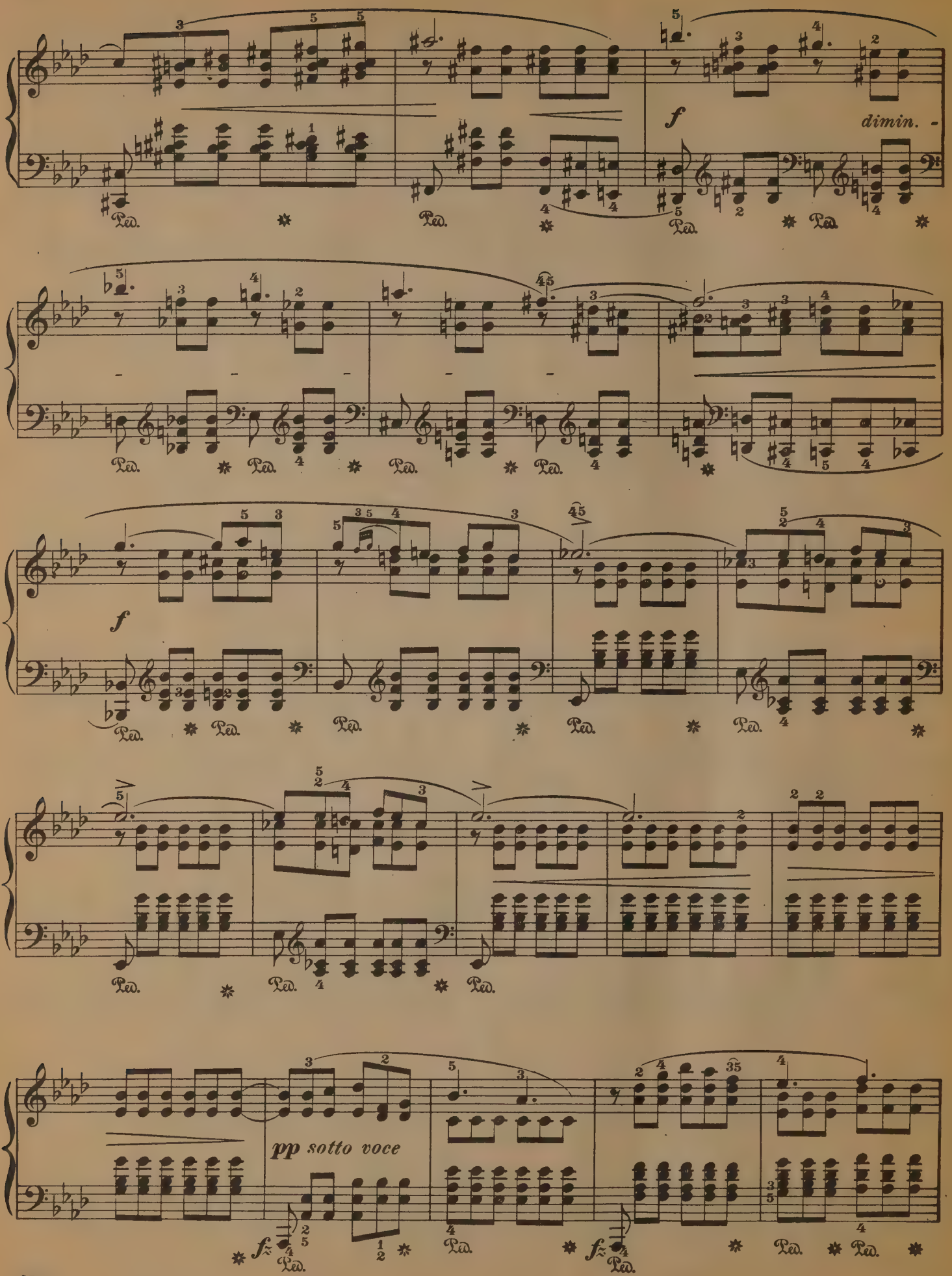
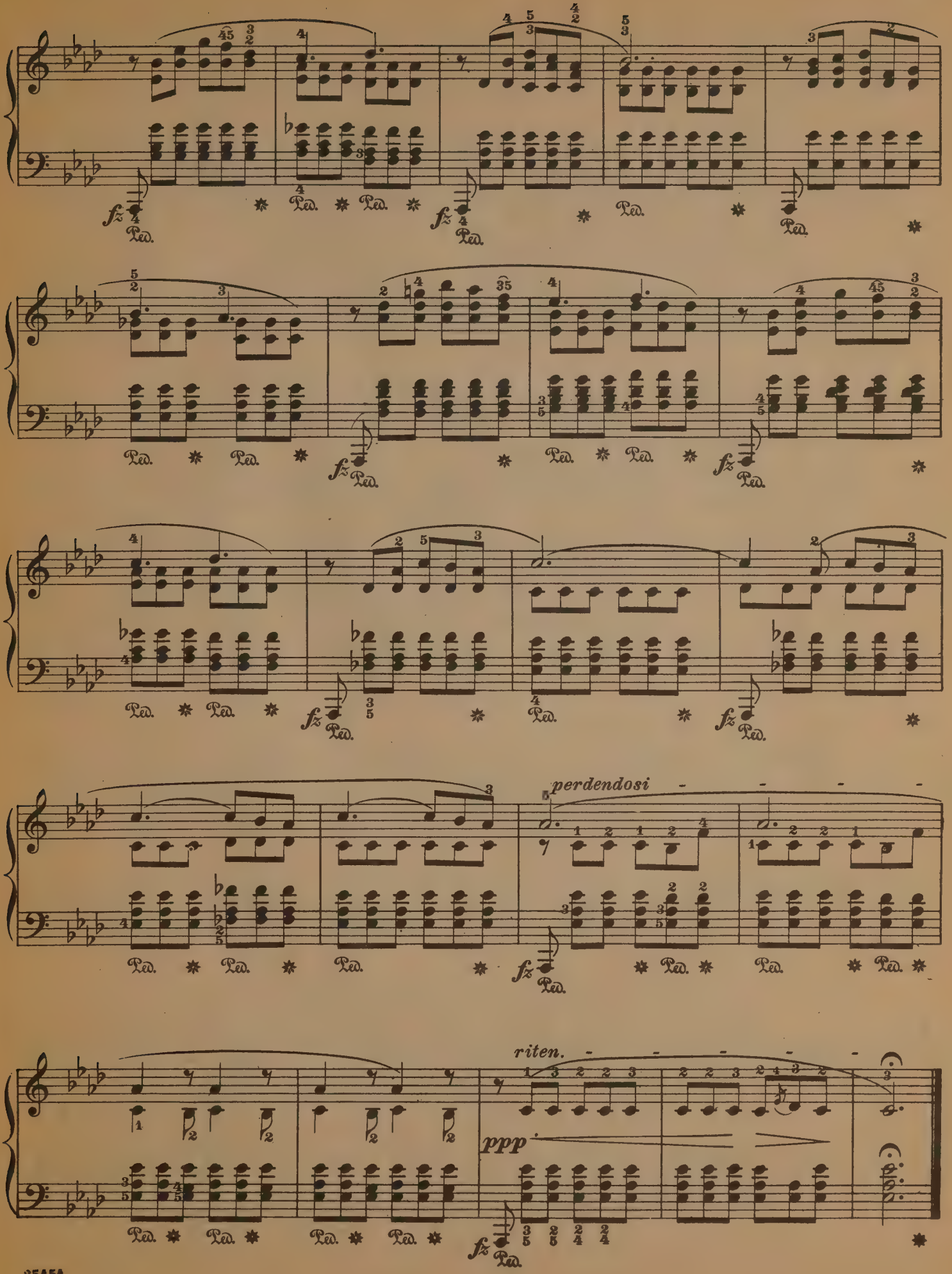

cresc.
ff
p
p


f
dimin.
Ped.
f
Ped.
pp sotto voce
fz
Ped.


perdendosi
riten.
ppp

Prélude

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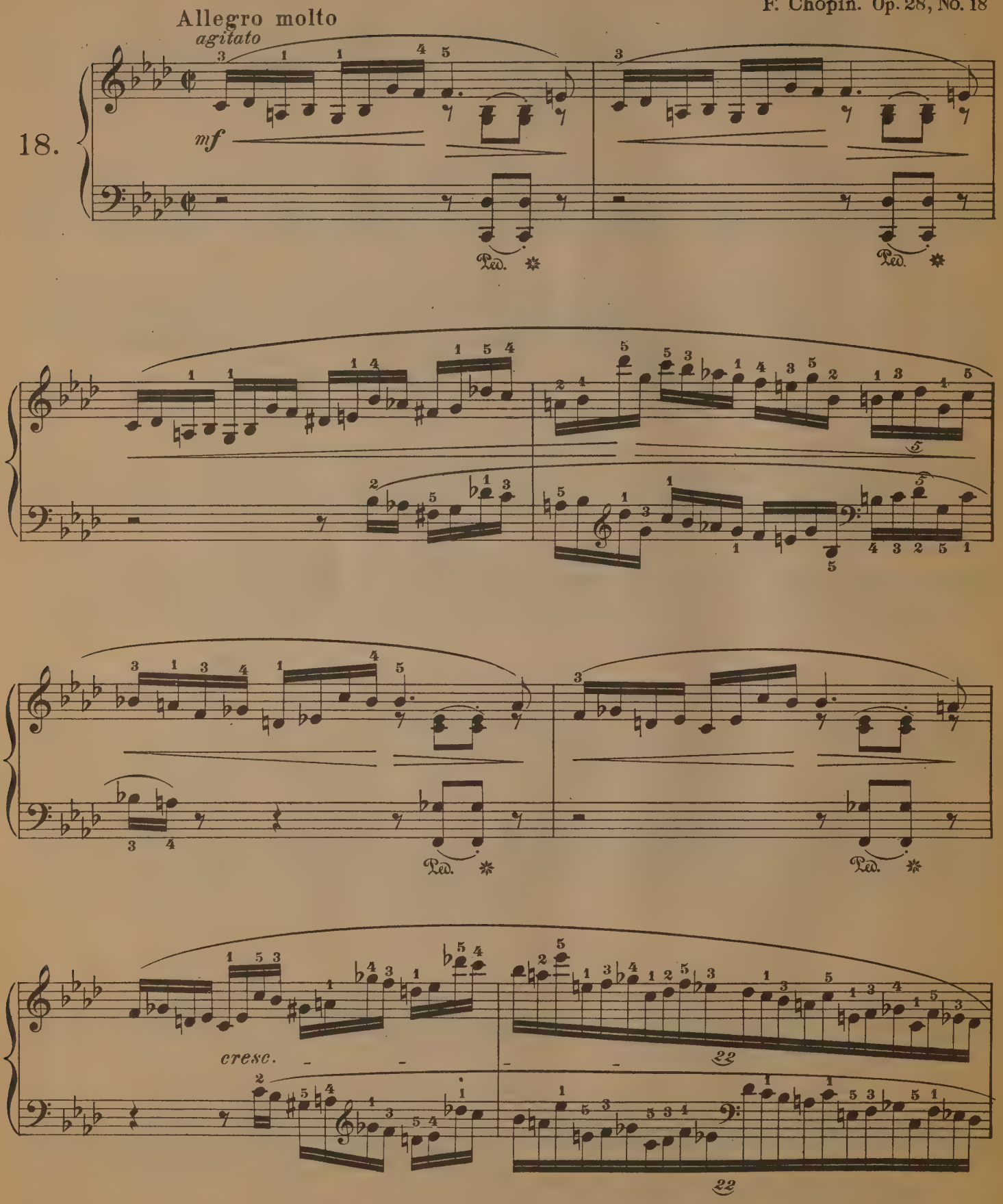
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 18



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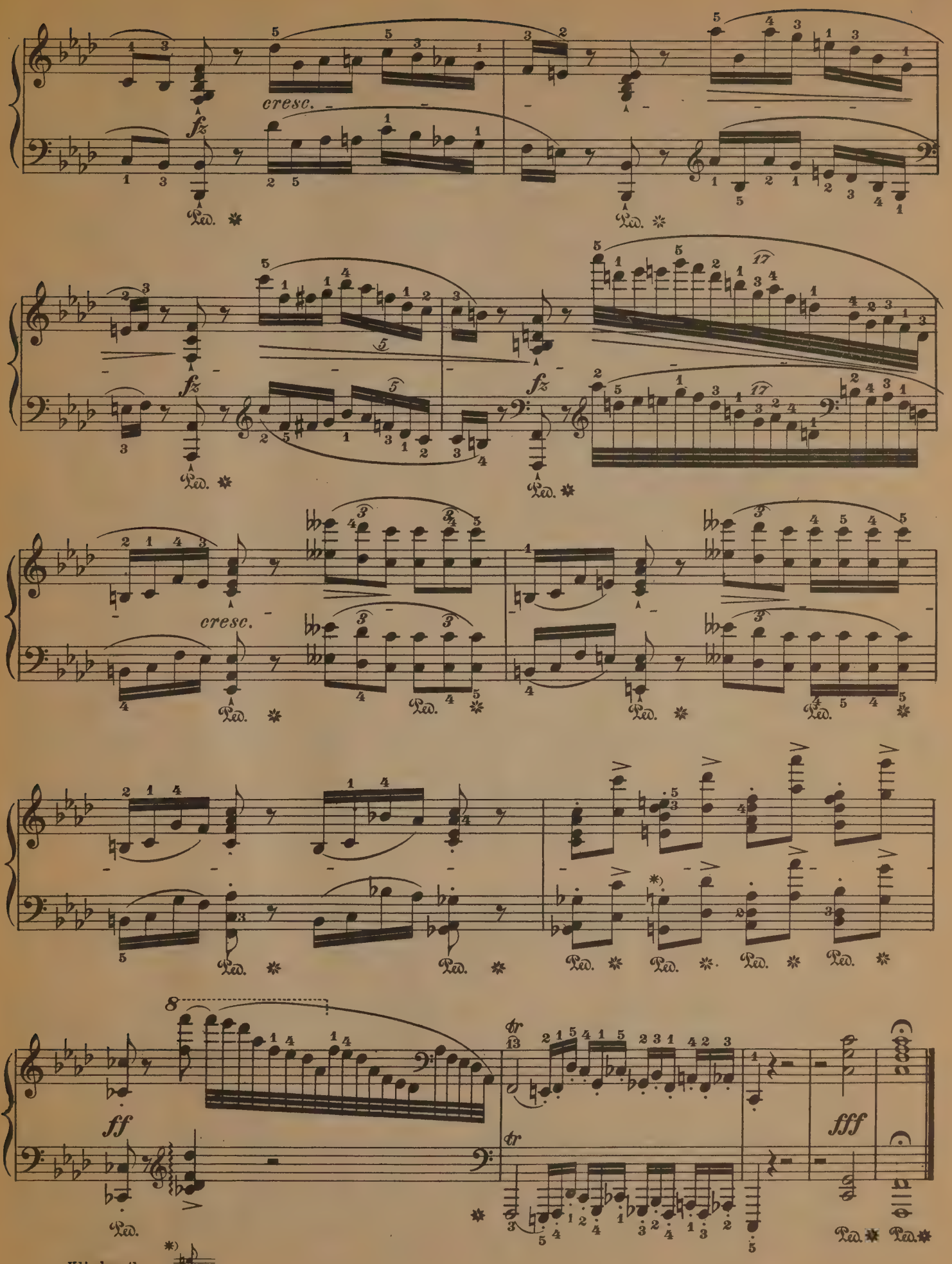
cresc.
fz
Ped.
cresc.
ff
fff
tr
8
*)

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Rafael Joseffy

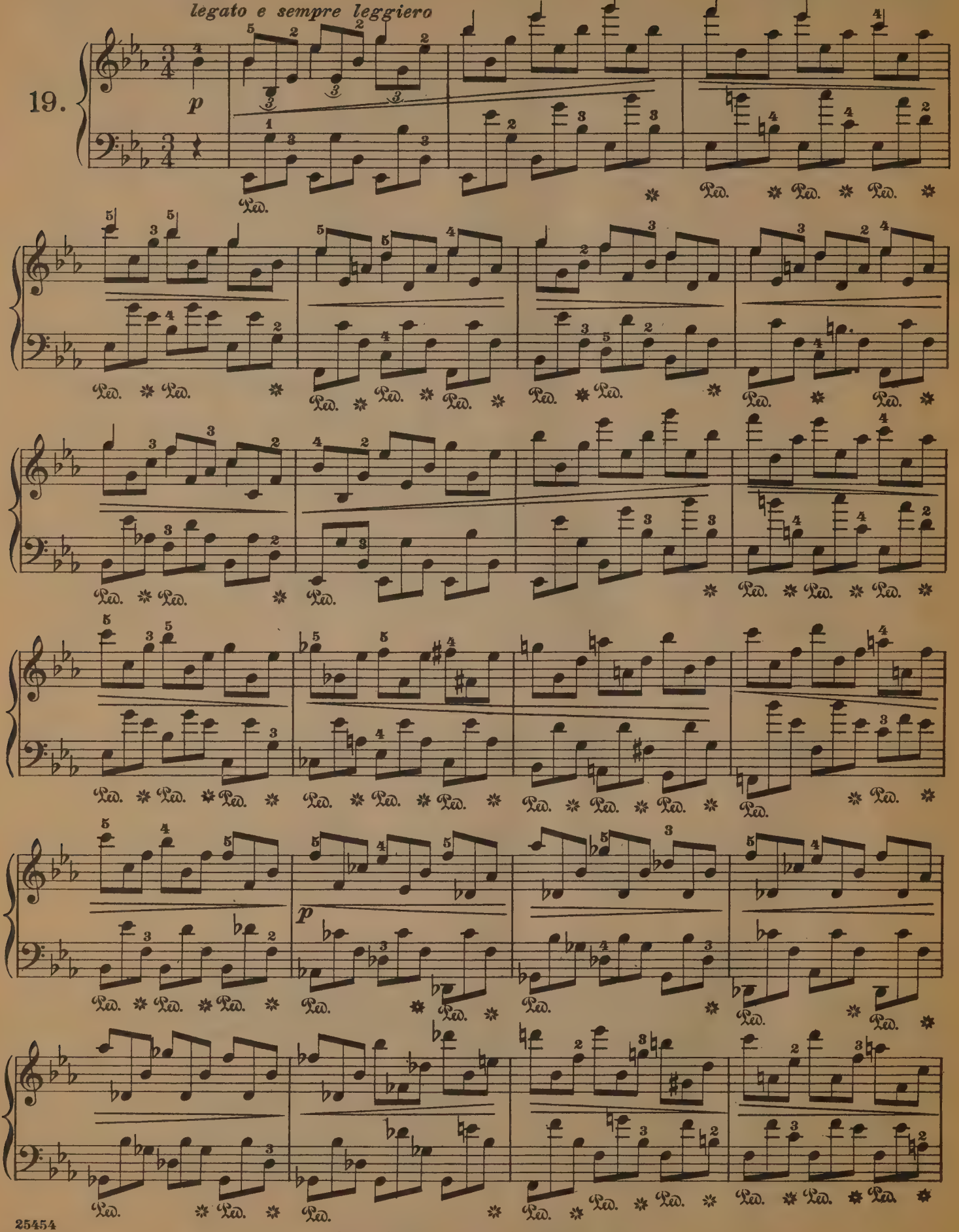
Prélude

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 19

Vivace

legato e sempre leggiero

19.



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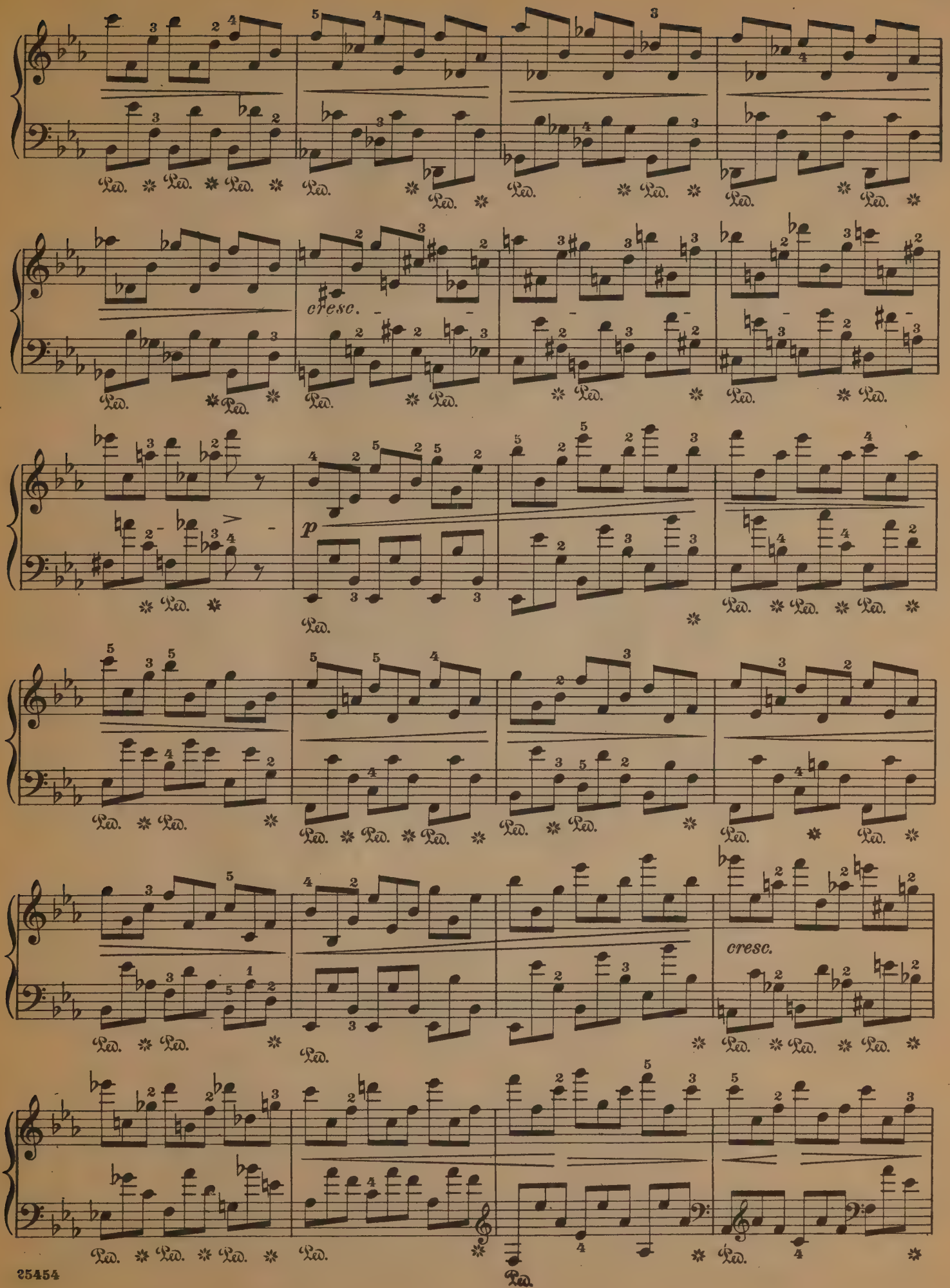
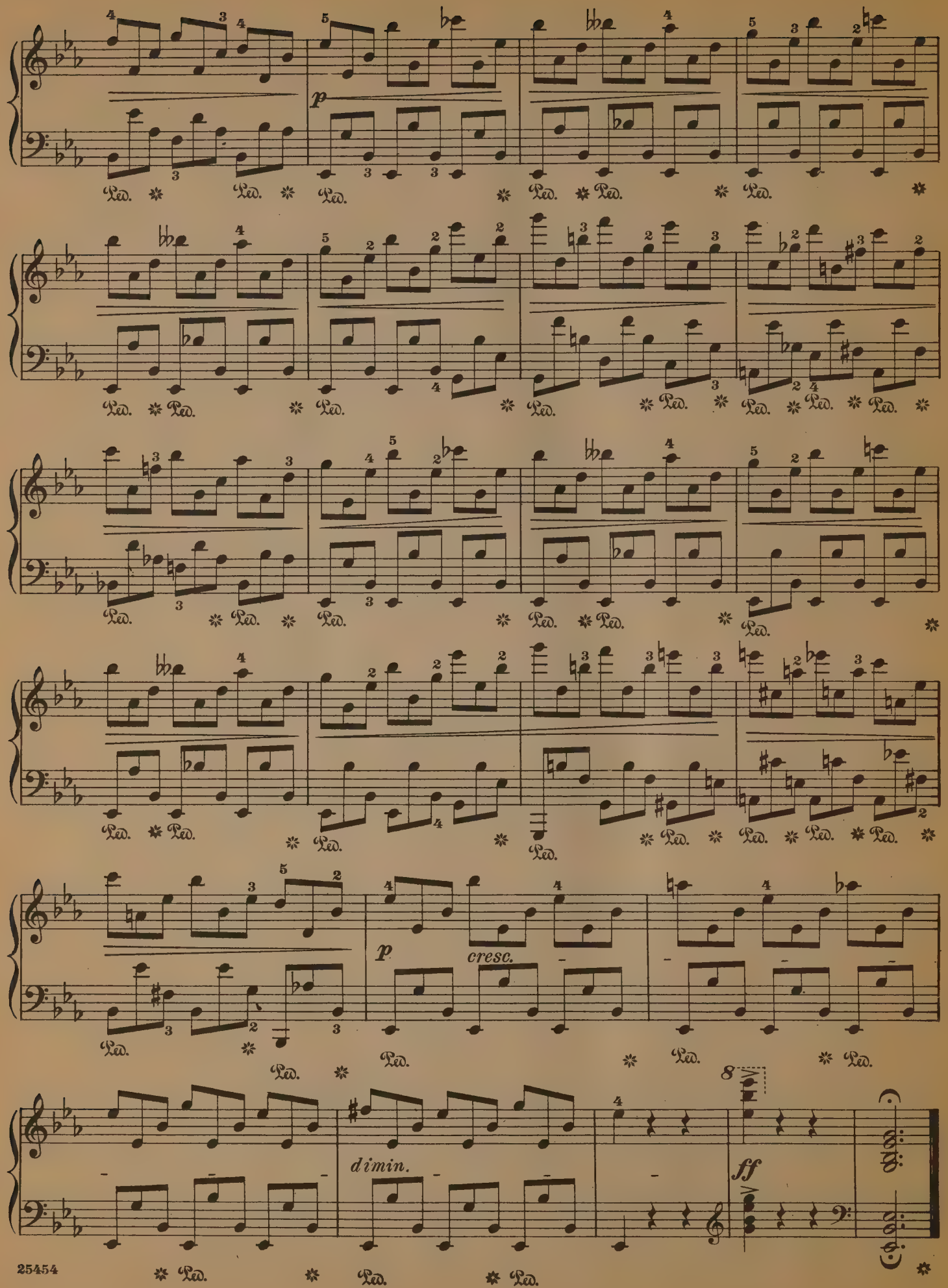

cresc.
p
cresc.


p
cresc.
p
dimin.
ff
8

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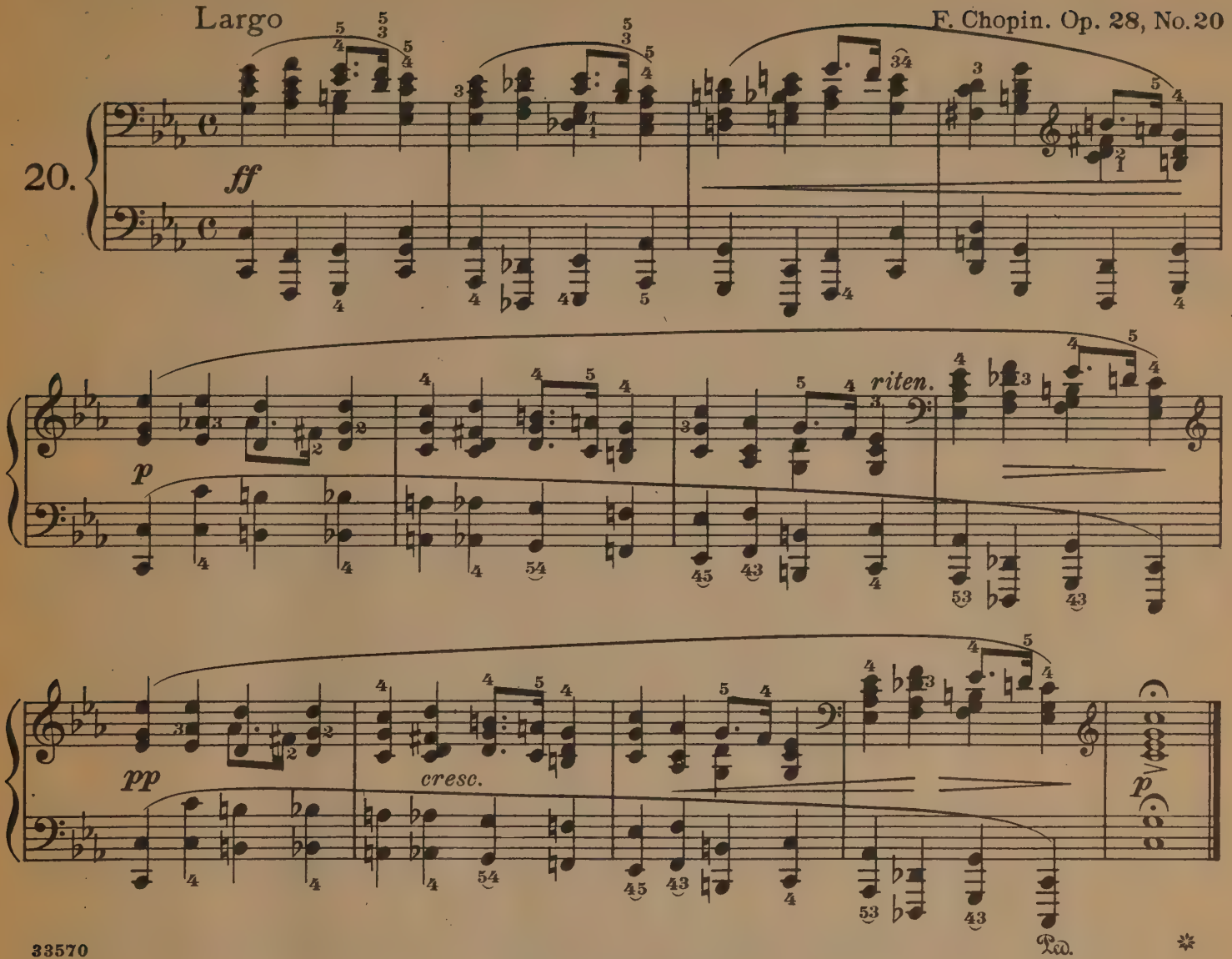
Prélude

Largo

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 20

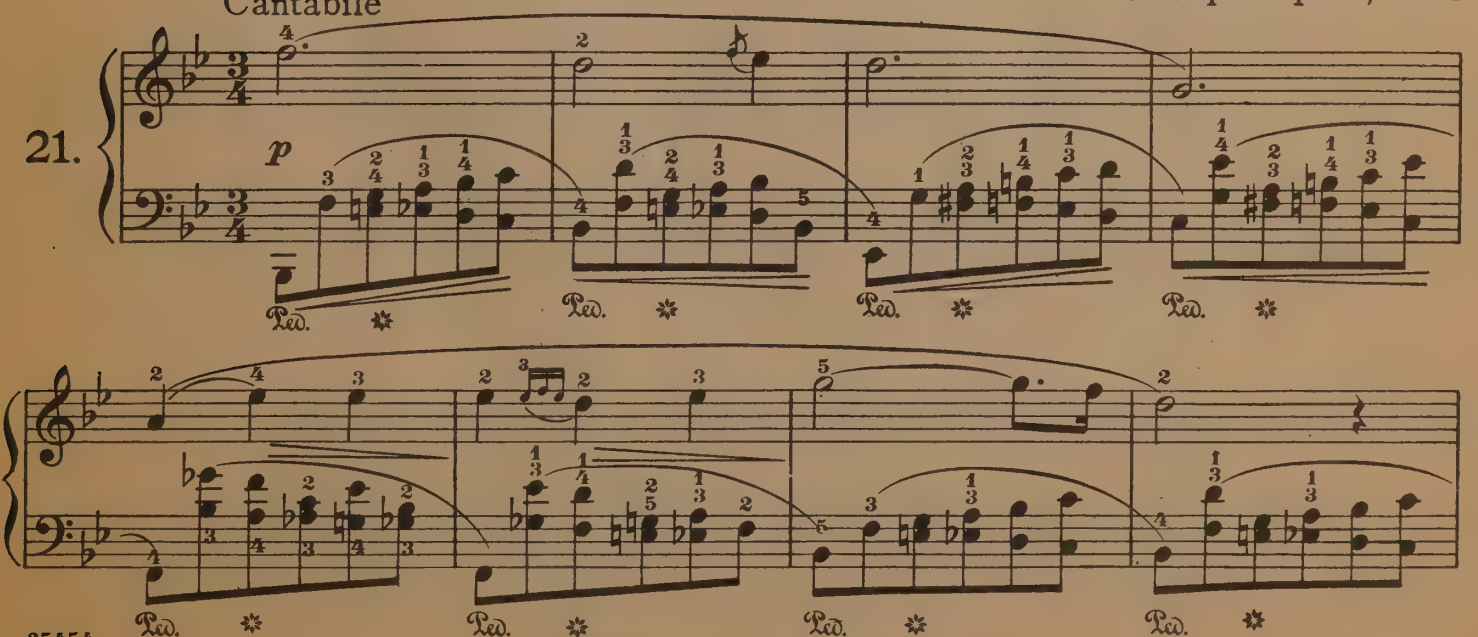


33570

Prélude

Cantabile

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 21



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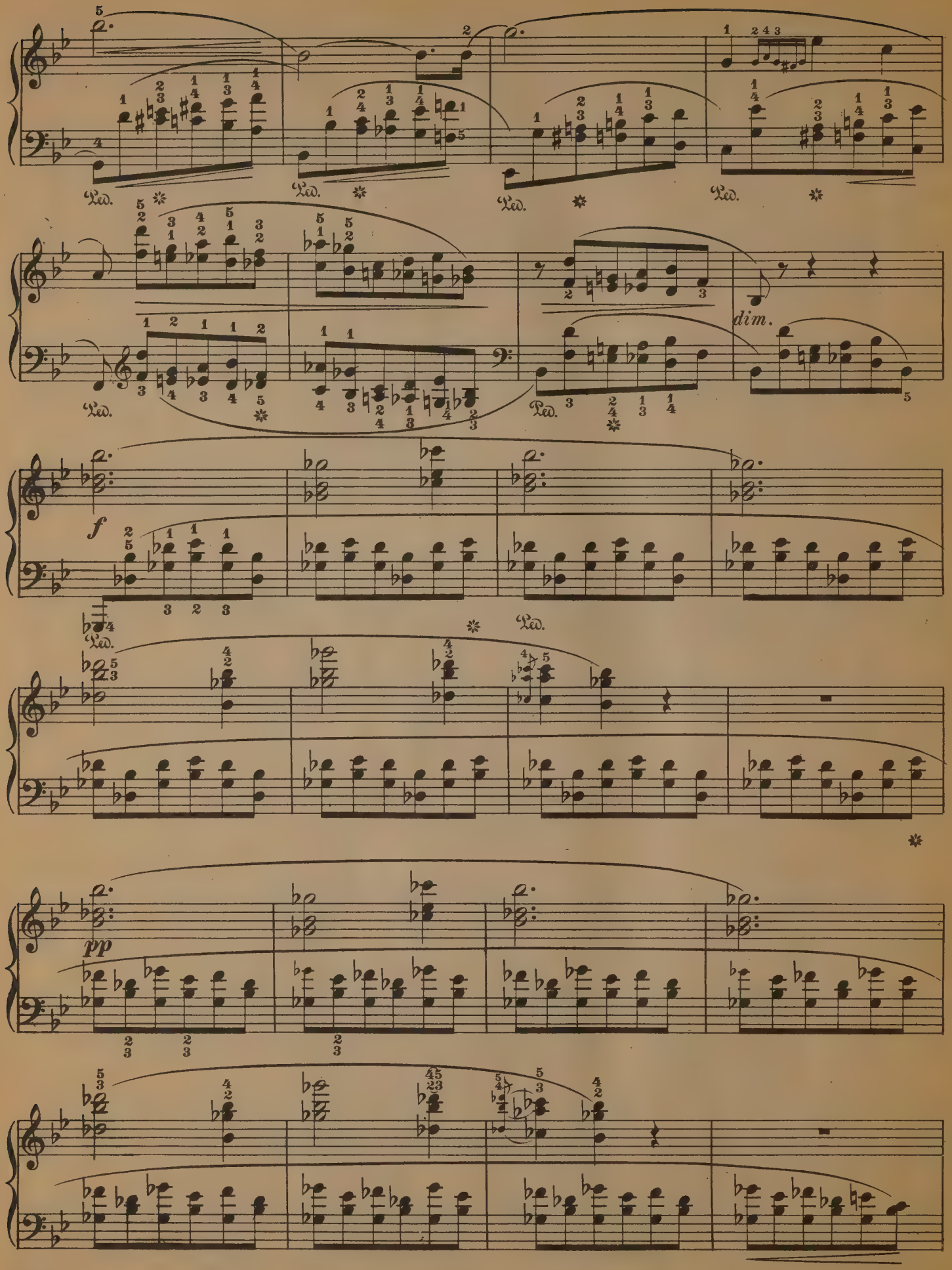
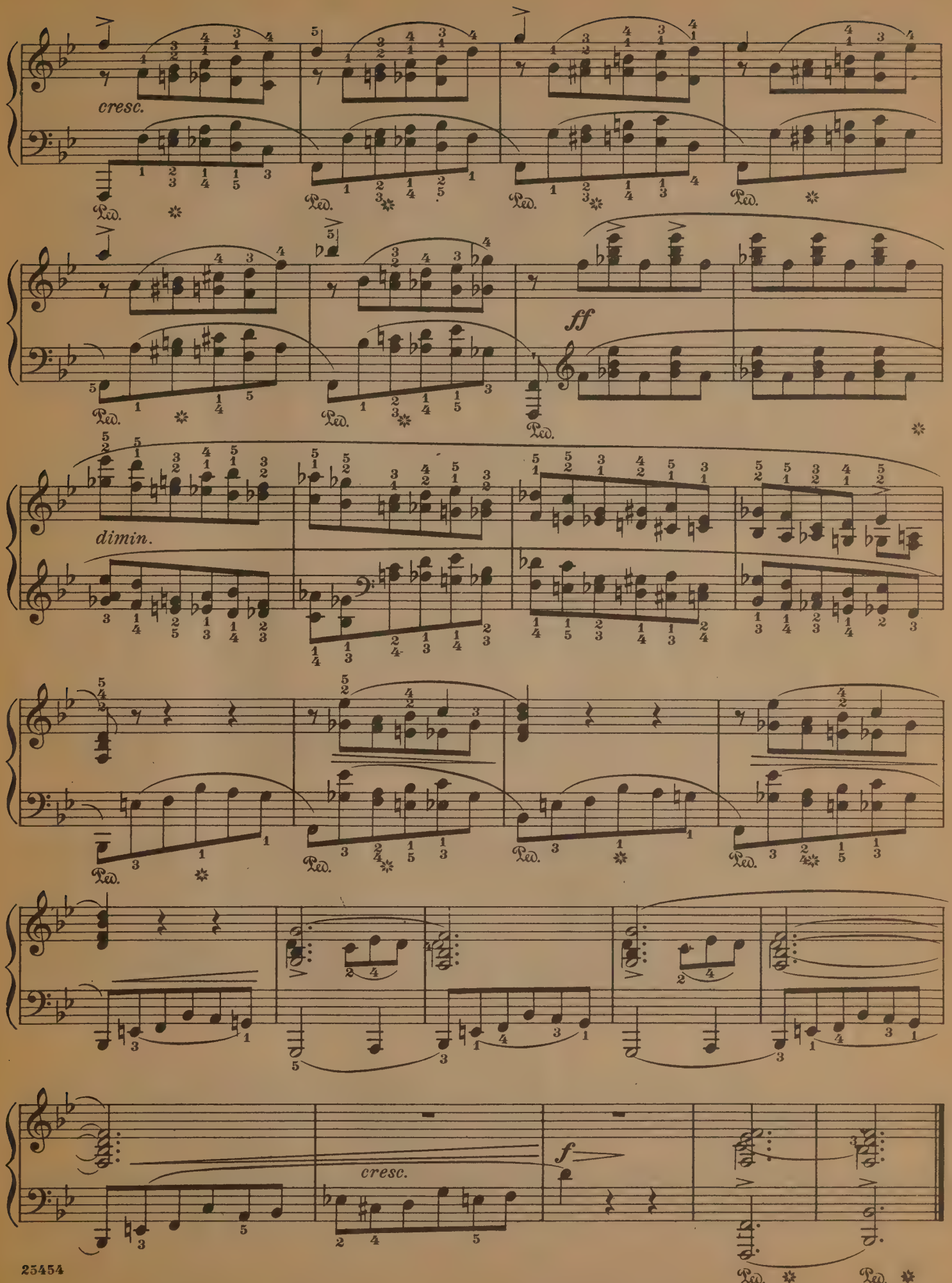

Ped.
dim.
f
pp

cresc.
Ped.
ff
dimin.
f
cresc.

Prélude

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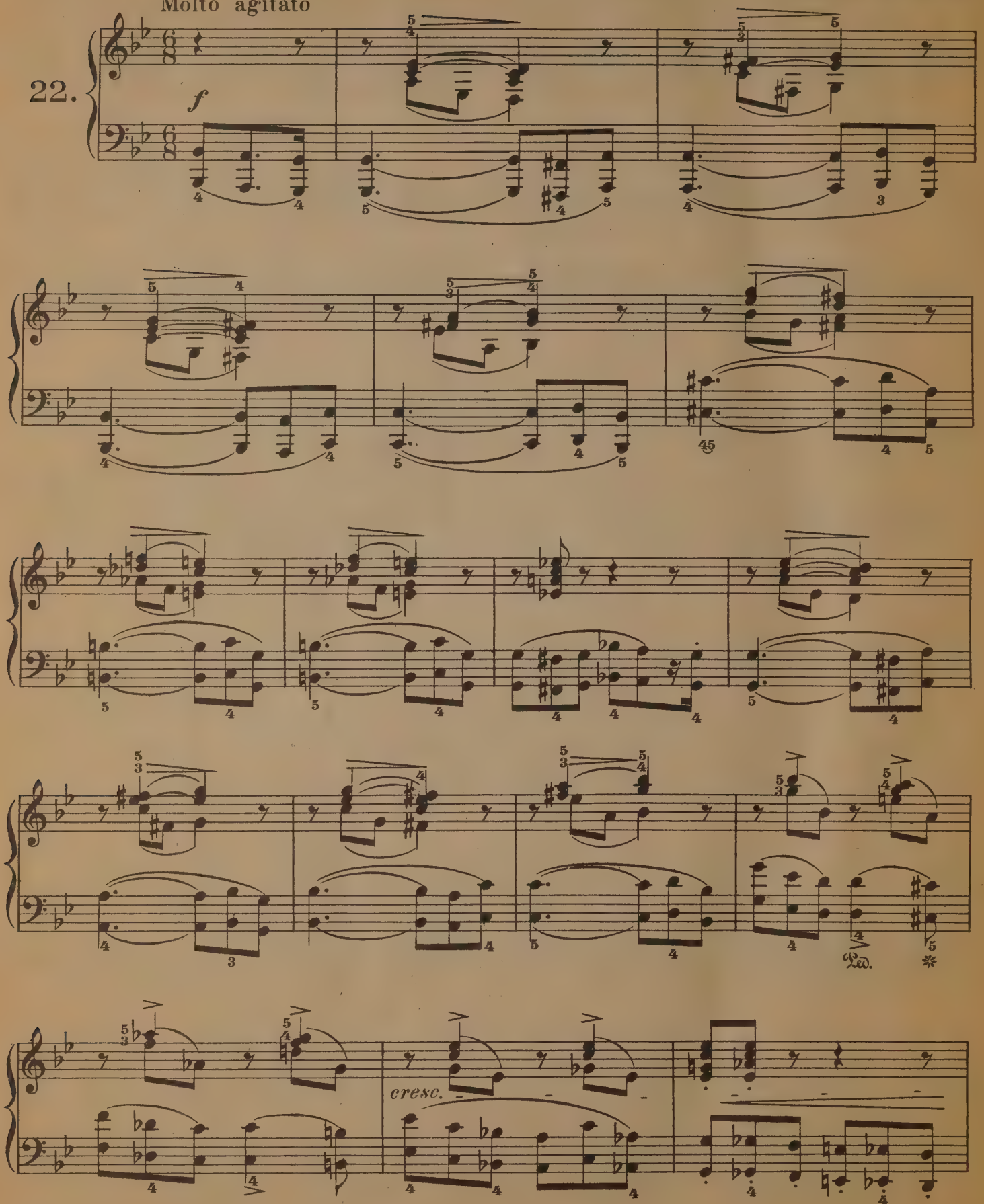
F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 22

Molto agitato

22.

f



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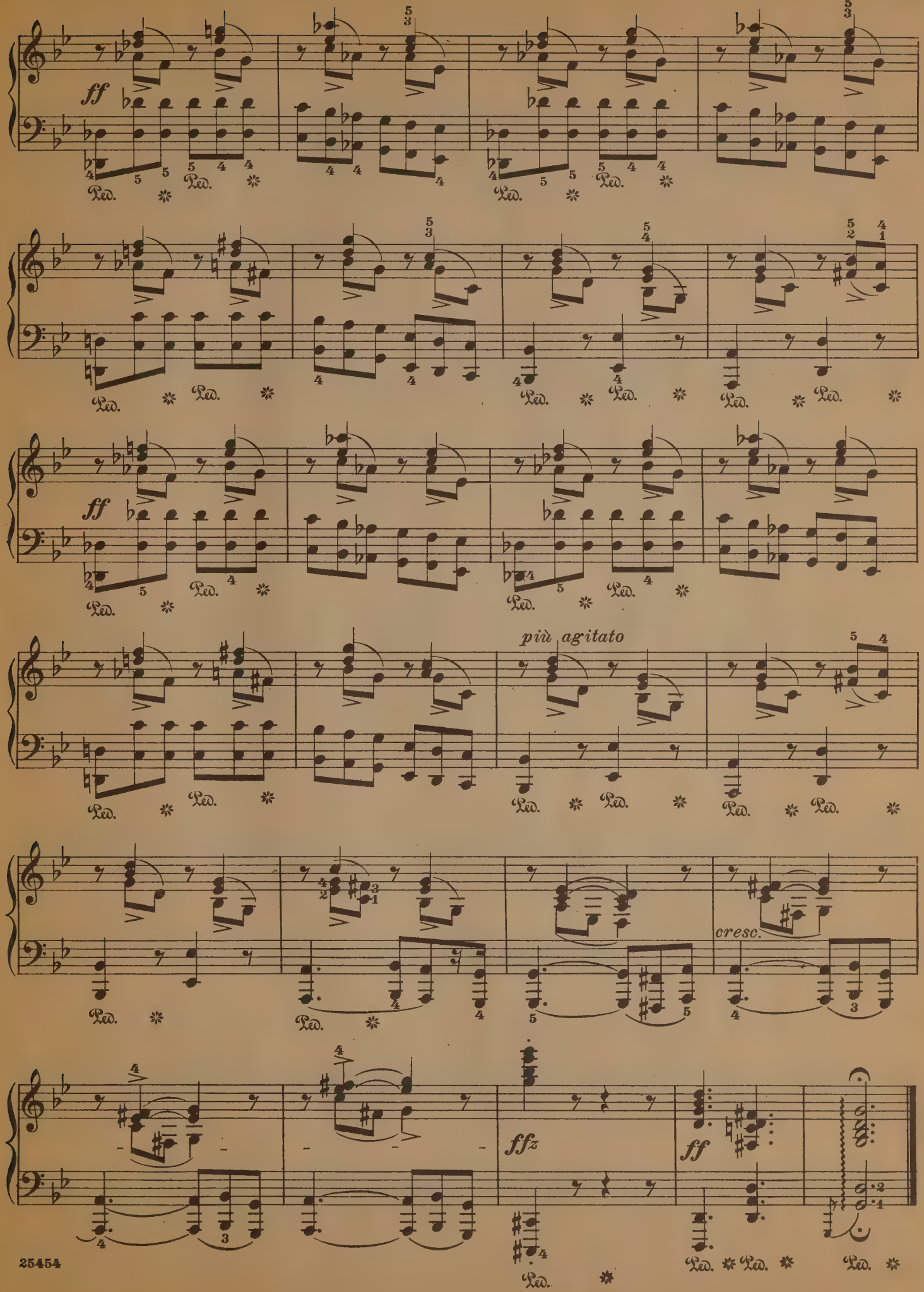
ff
Ped.
ff
più agitato
cresc.
ffz
ff

Prélude

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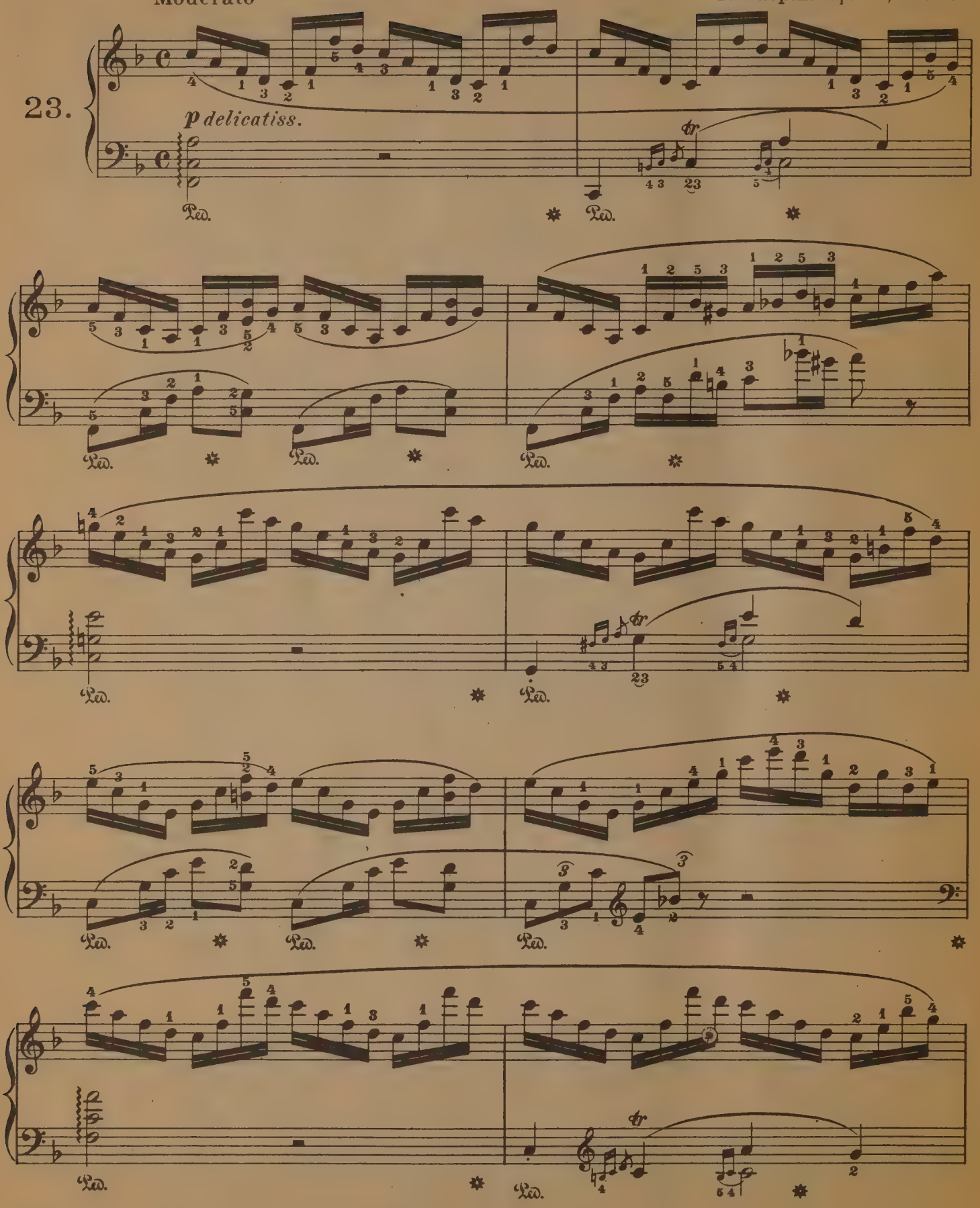
Moderato

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 23



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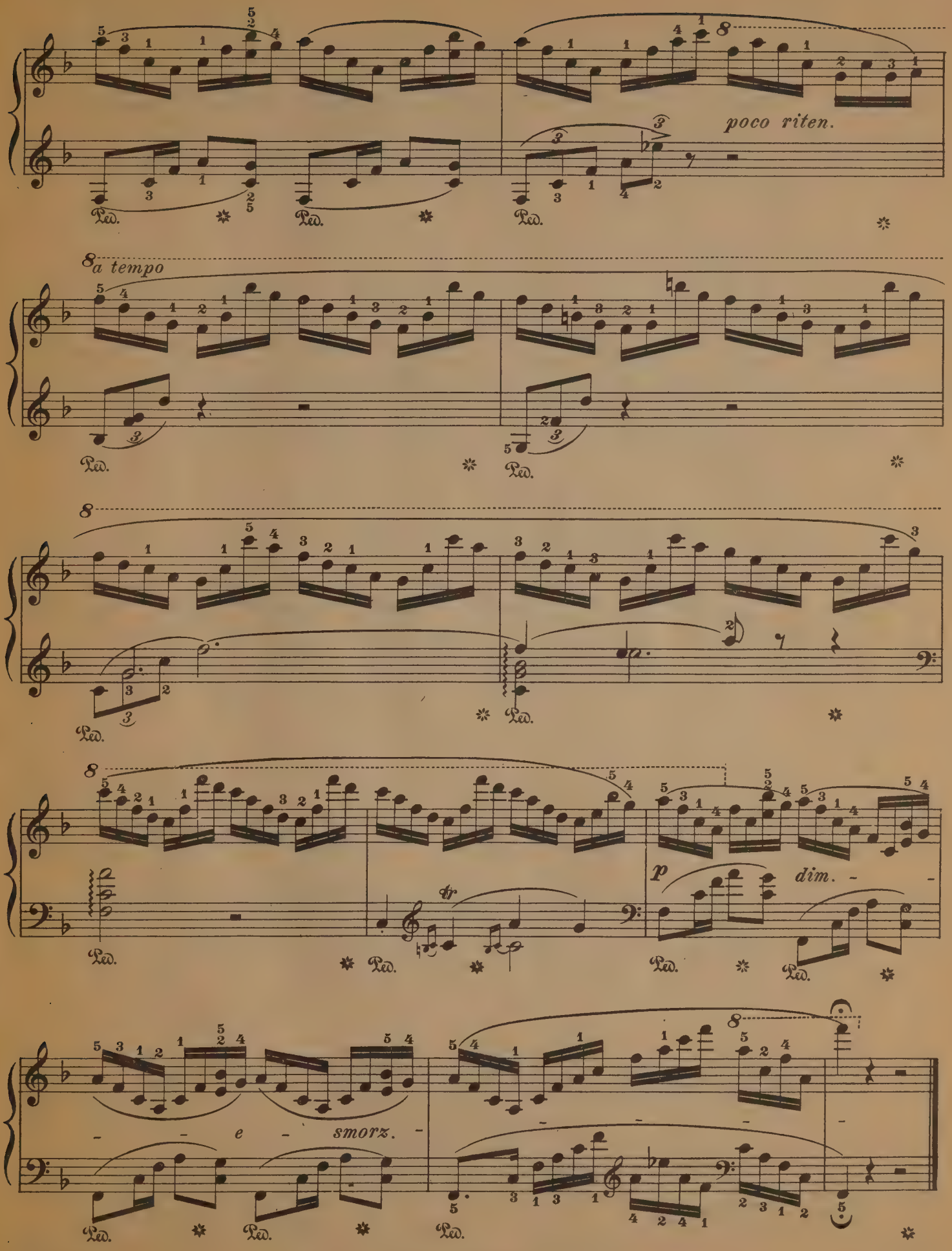
poco riten.
a tempo
p
dim.
tr
e
smorz.
Ped.

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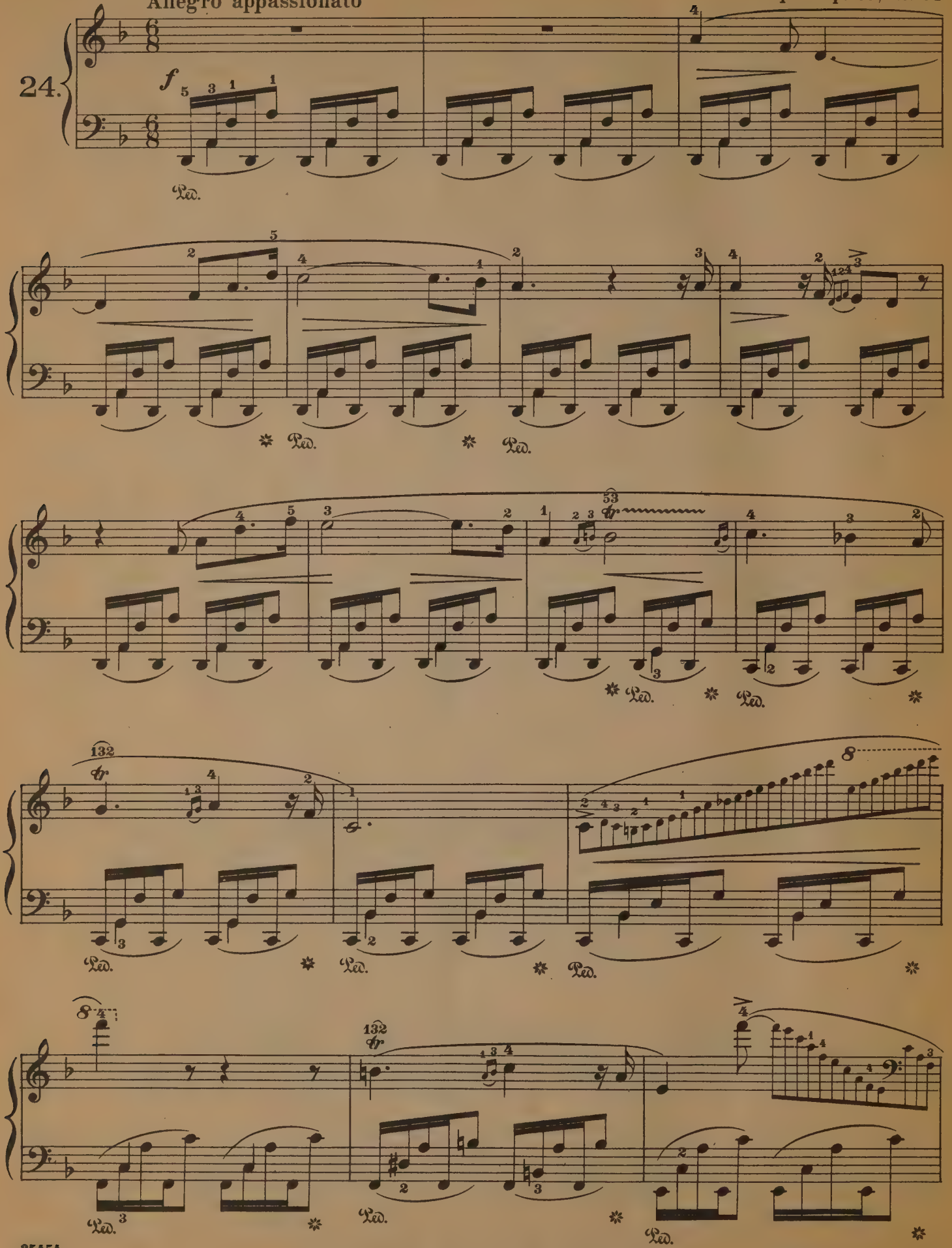
Rafael Joseffy

Prélude

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 24

Allegro appassionato

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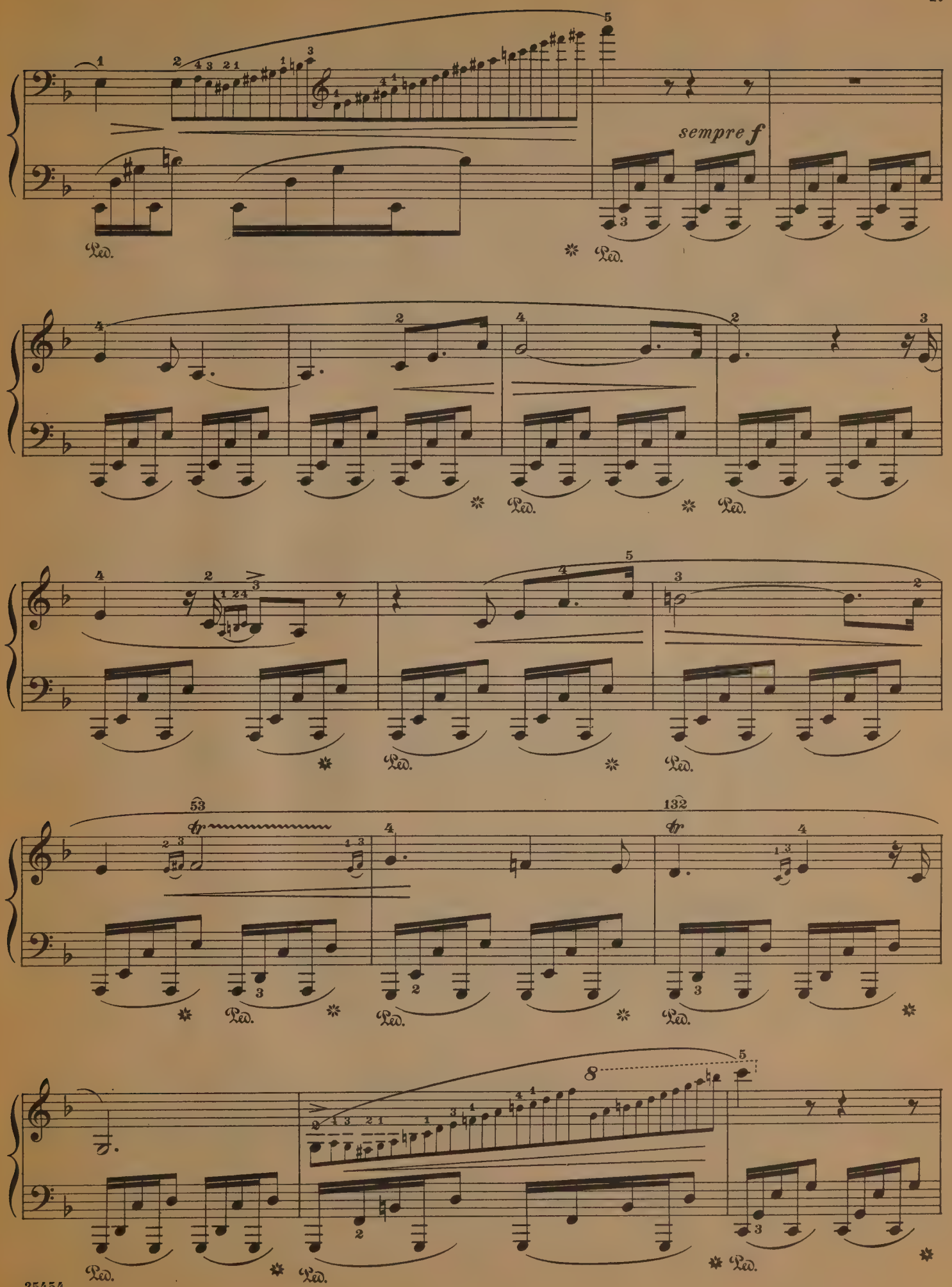
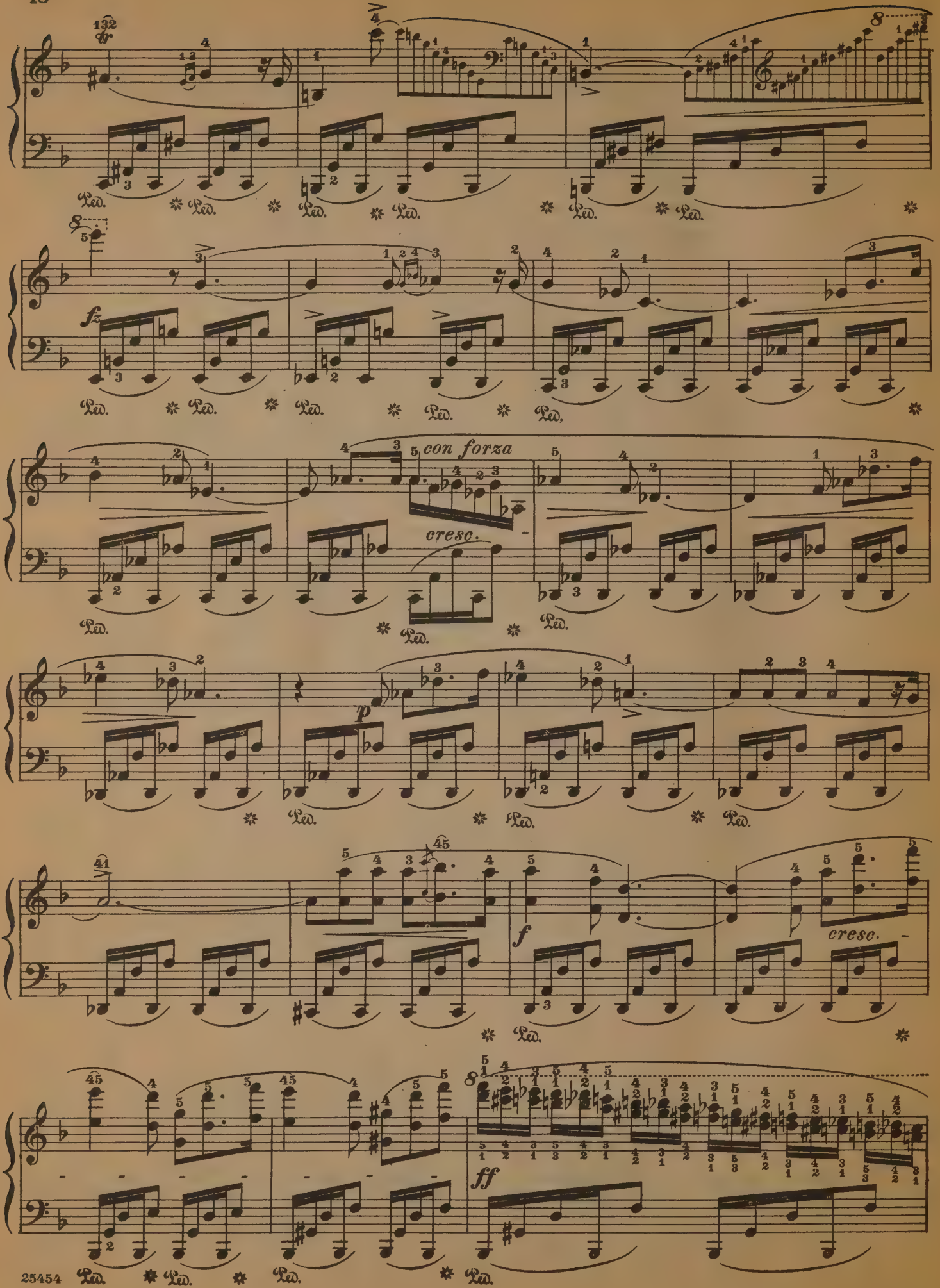
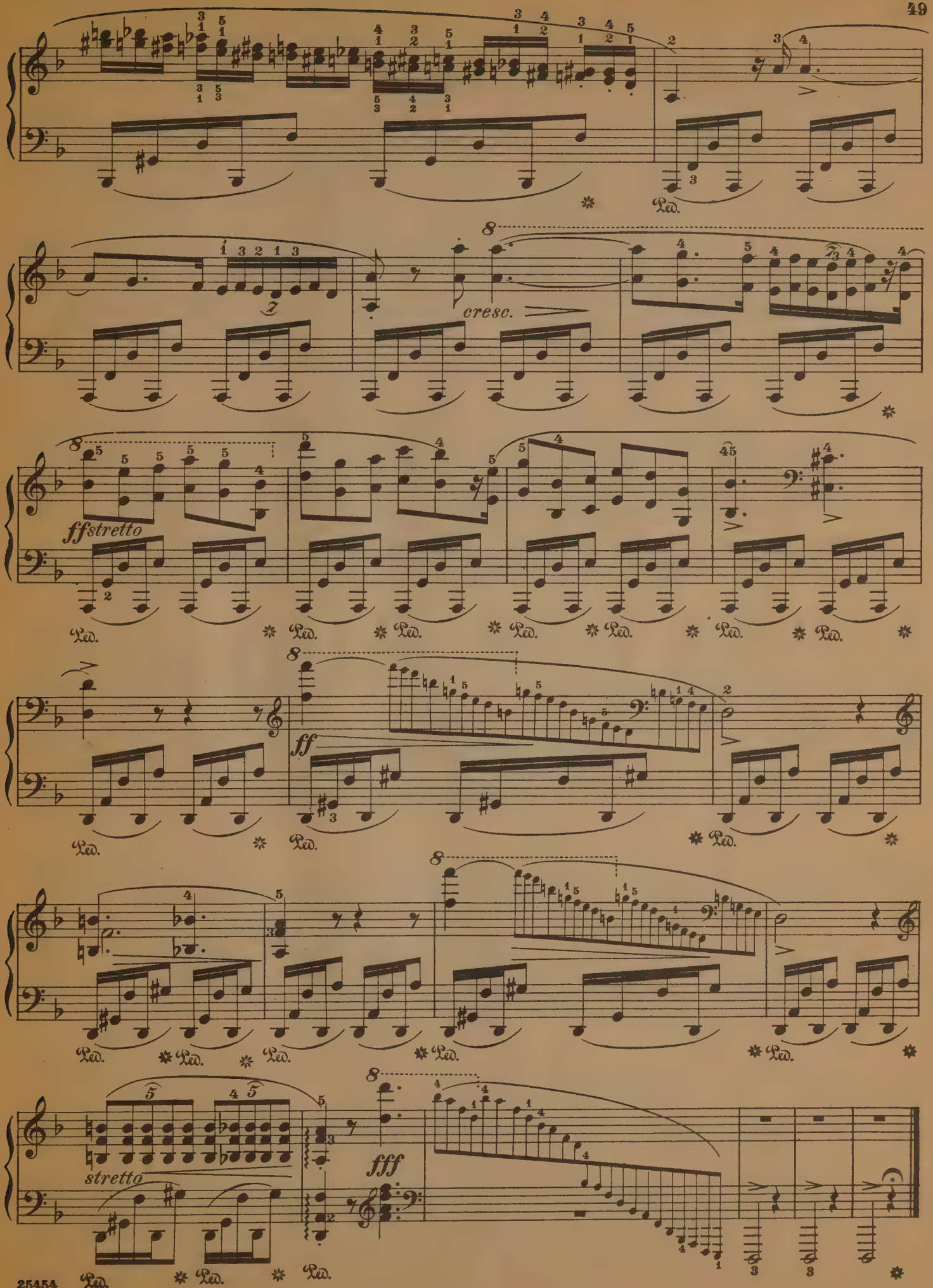

sempre f
Ped.
8


fz
con forza
cresc.
p
f
cresc.
ff

cresc.
ffstretto
ff
fff
stretto
Ped.

À Mlle la Princesse Élisabeth Czernicheff

Prélude

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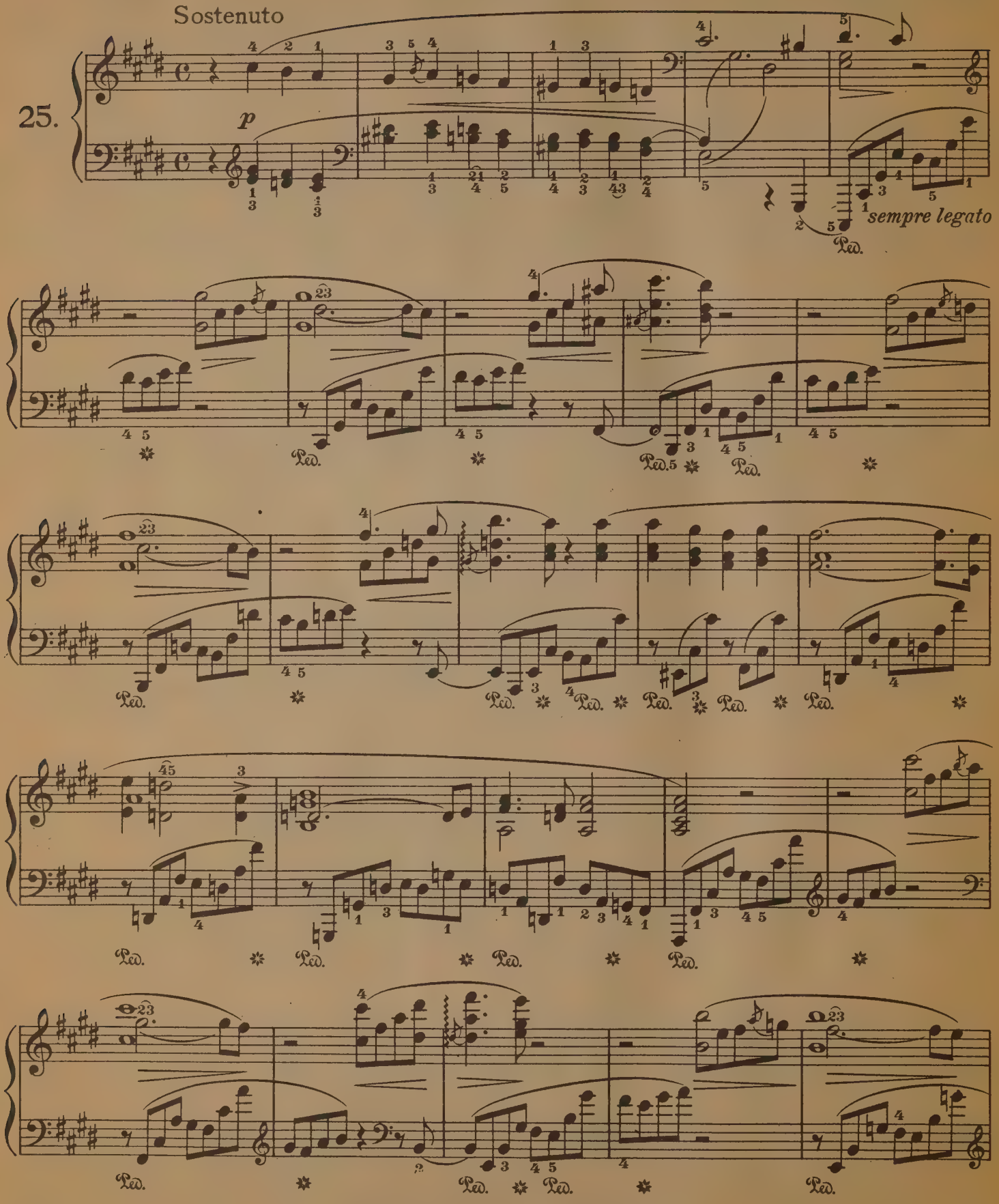
F. Chopin. Op. 45



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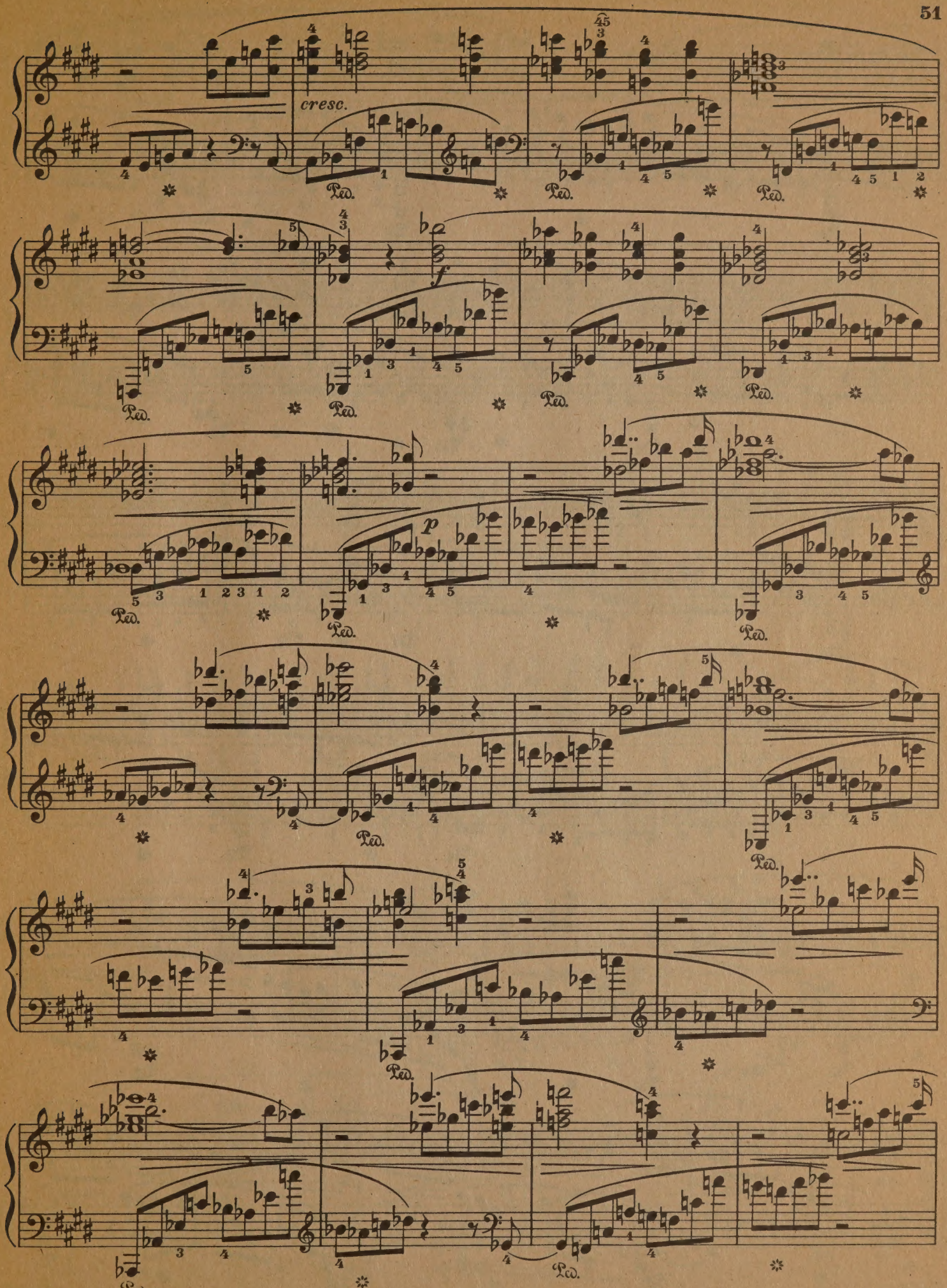
cresc.
f
p
Ped.

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